

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Section number _____ Page _____

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 100001029

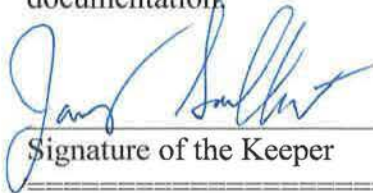
Date Listed: 7/13/2018

Property Name: Mt. Zion Methodist Church

County: Neshoba

State: MS

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

7.13.2018

Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 3/8: Level of Significance

The Level of Significance for the Mt. Zion Methodist Church is hereby changed to STATE.

The position of the Keeper remains that the nationally significant event of the murder of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman is best illustrated by multiple properties in the form of a discontinuous district. In isolation, the Mt. Zion Methodist Church tells only a part of the story (and important part) and that even evaluated as a "place," the changes to the site affect the historic integrity of the property as it relates to the events of June 21, 1964. The original church, burned a week before the meeting took place, is no longer extant. New resources, including the rebuilt church, the Fellowship Hall and the Masonic Lodge alter the setting of the property as it was on that day in 1964. The property now stands in testimonial to the strength and resilience of the congregation and community, and has achieved significance not just for the events of that June night, but beyond.

The Mississippi State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



56-1029

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: Mt. Zion Methodist Church _____

Other names/site number: Mt. Zion United Methodist Church _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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

2. Location

Street & number: 11191 Road 741 _____

City or town: Philadelphia _____ State: Mississippi _____ County: Neshoba _____

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:

X national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

<u>Kate Blant</u>	<u>3-27-17</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>SHPO</u>	
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

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

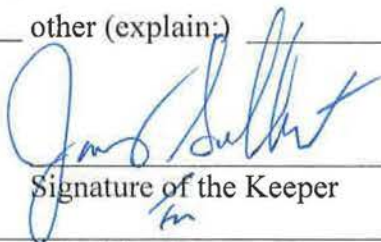
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4. National Park Service Certification

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

7.13.2018
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>1</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
<u>1</u>	_____	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility _____

FUNERARY/cemetery _____

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility _____

FUNERARY/cemetery _____

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Late 20th Century Vernacular _____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Concrete Block, Asphalt shingles _____

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 on a high point of ground on the west side of Route 747 in the rural community of Longdale, Neshoba County, Mississippi, the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church Complex is composed of buildings, a site, objects, and landscape features that contribute to the historical significance of the property and retain integrity from the period of significance. The church is located approximately eight and a half miles east of the Neshoba County seat of Philadelphia. Built in 1966 and rebuilt in 1971 of brick veneered concrete block, the church and fellowship hall were constructed after a devastating KKK-perpetrated fire destroyed the older, frame church that stood on the property. The significance of this church is associated with the social history of the community of Longdale and the Civil Rights history relating to the events leading up to and the subsequent commemorations of the Freedom Summer murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman on June 21, 1964. The rebuilt church continues to be a place of commemoration of these events. The rebuilt church also fits in the context of the rebuilding period for African American churches after arson fires burned their previous sanctuaries. Concentrated in the 1960s, the period stretches to about 1980, as congregations made a statement

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by rebuilding on their historic property in building programs that often took several years or even decades to complete and often involved funding from philanthropic organizations. The rebuilt church and grounds retain sufficient architectural integrity to convey the history and persistence of the community that worshiped here in the face of the terrorism that was perpetrated against them.

Narrative Description

The Mt. Zion United Methodist Church is an L-shaped single story building that contains the worship space and the office wing. It is constructed of concrete block with a brick veneer laid in running bond and is surmounted by a cross gable roof covered in asphalt shingle. The long elevations, north and south, display a course of soldier course brick at the eave as a visual terminus for the wall. The three by six bay section that faces County Road 747 contains the main worship space and the tall vertical windows that light this space are all fabricated of aluminum. Interior finishes and sanctuary windows date to repairs from a 1971 fire.

Facade of Sanctuary and Office Wing

The east facade of the sanctuary section of the church projects from the plane of the wing by three bays. The sanctuary is crowned by an aluminum clad pyramid-shaped spire set on a square base that is placed at the ridge of the roof over the altar-end of the sanctuary. The bricks of the veneer are laid in running bond with four-brick groupings projecting in a regular decorative pattern on the facade consisting of two alternating vertical rows flanking the central bay. Three bays wide, the central bay is dominated by an aluminum-framed, six-paned window with a triangular pane emulating a pointed arch top. The glass appears darkened and is covered on the interior by a decorative film. The window is set in a stuccoed vertical band the width of the window that is painted white that begins at the eighth course of brick above the ground and ends at the peak of the gable. The facade of the office wing is three bays wide. The entry to the building is set recessed slightly into the facade at the bay where the office wing connects to the sanctuary. The double leaf entrance doors have four panels and above display a semi-circular window with radiating muntins. The doorway is addressed with a ramp which gently rises from the concrete sidewalk leading from the parking lot in the front of the building. A set of three concrete steps also provides access from a sidewalk that parallels the planting bed adjacent to the facade of the wing. The two additional bays of the wing contain metal 2/2 horizontal paned windows with rowlock sills and no additional trim. Foundation planting beds occur across the facade and north elevation of the sanctuary. The corner stone for the church was placed in the second bay of the office wing. White marble, it provides the following information:

"Mt. Zion U.M. Church; Built - 1893 Rebuilt- 1965; Rebuilt After Fire-1971; C. Steele-Chrmn; J.C. Cole-Sec.; W.Y. Steele- Treas.; Bldg Committee; J. Cole; R. Jones; C. Steele; C.F. Foster- Pastor; S.S. Barnett- D.S.; S.L. Webb- D.S.; M.L. Harris-Bishop; E.J. Henderson-Bishop; H.W. Williams- Pastor; Joe Lyons-[?]NTR"

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North Elevation of the Sanctuary

Three bays of the north elevation are visible. A course of rowlock bricks are placed at the top of the wall adjacent to the eave. The two bays next to the entry are two windows that light the sanctuary. The windows date to the 1971 repairs and are a vertical composition of two sets of three single panes over two horizontal panes that extend the width of the window over a larger single pane. Each has a simple concrete sill and the area above each window displays a repair to shorten the window height.

South Elevation of the Sanctuary

The south elevation is six bays long and displays a bright metal framed multi-paned window in the four western bays, a single leaf door accessing the sanctuary in the fifth bay, and a blank sixth bay. The windows are the same that appear in the north elevation, with the same arrangement and detail. They also appear to have been changed. The single leaf door appears to be of recent vintage and has projecting panels in a cross and bible configuration. The door is set above a stoop of two concrete steps with a simple PVC pipe railing on one side. The blank bay corresponds to the altar portion of the sanctuary on the interior.

Rear of the Sanctuary and the Office Wing

The rear, or west elevation, clearly displays the end of the sanctuary portion of the building and the extension of the office wing. Seven bays in width, the two southern bays display the same metal windows that occur on the south elevation. The bricks above and below the windows are laid three brick wide stack bond. The peak of the gable end displays a louvered attic vent. The office wing extends five bays to the north from the sanctuary. Four of the five bays include 2/2 horizontal lite metal widows with a rowlock sills and no other trim. The fifth bay includes a wood door with a small single pane opening centered in the upper half of the door. The surround is plain and a single concrete step sits below. These openings are irregularly placed along this elevation.

Interior

The rectangular sanctuary is on an east-west axis, with the chancel on the eastern end separated from the congregational seating by a communion rail and elevated on a stage. The pulpit is accessed by a step, a short landing and then three more steps up to the area for the preacher on the left and the choir on the right. The chancel is lit by the multi-paned central window with its multi-colored coating. The pulpit furnishings are of light colored wood and include a lectern, and chairs, as well as green velvet covered theater seating for the choir. The communion rail on the floor flanks the first step up to the altar. The vertically laid concrete block walls are finished in white paint. The light-colored wood pews are laid out with a central aisle.

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The congregation space is divided into two sections by an accordion divider. The larger forward section is accessed from the hallway through a double leaf swinging wood door and has beige carpeting. The smaller rear section has linoleum tile flooring and a separate entrance from the hallway. Wood trim in the space is limited to door casings, the opening between the two sections of the congregation space and a window sized opening, now filled in, that originally provided access between the adjacent office and the rear section, and was probably filled in during the 1971 repairs. This wood trim is all similarly detailed dark stained pine with simple classically inspired detailing.

The L-shaped hallway parallels the sanctuary and turns right along a double loaded corridor providing access to enclosed small offices, including the pastor's office, and rest room facilities.

Placed next to the entrance to the sanctuary is a cast metal plaque with the following text:

"Out of One Blood God Hath Made All Men; This plaque is dedicated to the memory of; Michael Schwerner; James Chaney; Andrew Goodman; Whose concern for others, and more particularly those of this community, led to their early martyrdom. Their deaths quickened men's consciences and more firmly established justice, liberty, and brotherhood in our land."

Fellowship Hall

The Fellowship Hall, constructed c. 2001, is connected to the L-shaped church and office wing by a single bay wide, frame hyphen. The hyphen encloses the formerly exterior concrete steps between the two building sections. The fellowship hall is a one story, three bay, masonry structure set on a poured concrete foundation with a frame gable roof structure. The walls are laid in a running bond. The facade of the fellowship hall faces east. The poured concrete deck is a step up from the concrete sidewalk and is centered on this elevation. The frame gabled porch roof supported by simple unadorned posts with brackets. The main exterior entrance into the social hall is a double leaf door centered on this elevation. The north elevation displays four regularly spaced windows openings with vinyl windows and rowlock sills. The rear elevation displays two irregularly placed windows of similar configuration. The south elevation displays a single bay with window of similar fabric as the rest of the windows in the social hall. The facade of the hyphen is one bay wide and has a single leaf door occupying the majority of the width of the space. The walls on the facade and rear display wide Masonite siding. The rear of the hyphen displays a metal 2/2 horizontal paned window centered on the wall.

A planting bed outlined with railroad ties is placed along the north side of the facade and continues across the north elevation.

The interior of the fellowship hall contains a full working kitchen along the west wall and an open plan space with folding tables in the remainder of the building. The walls display framed flat exhibits of historical information about the church, the community, and its history.

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Mt. Zion Cemetery

The John Willie Wells Cemetery at Mt. Zion Church is located to the south of the church building and occupies the hillside adjacent to the church sloping down to the treed margins to the south and west and toward County Road 747. Burials date from the earliest period of the establishment of the church. Earliest internments in the Jones family are marked with large field stones without inscriptions. Generally laid out in rows, the marked burials display monuments of stone and concrete. Some plots display concrete grave covers and some are covered with white stones, the plot outlined in brick, wood shingle, or other material. Some burials display extensive plantings over the grave. Military issued markers are also present. The cemetery is a contributing site.

The Old Mt. Zion Church Bell and Stand

The bell from the church survived the fire in 1968 and is placed on a metal stand set to southeast of the church. The yoke of the bell is marked "The C.S. Bell and Co." and was manufactured in Hillsboro, Ohio. The bell is a contributing object.

Landscape Features

The nominated parcel is triangular in shape and the church building is placed on the high spot on the parcel. Two gravel drives provide entrance to the parcel, one from the direction of Philadelphia to the west and one from the center of the Longdale community to the east. The drives are separated by ditches, limiting access to the parcel to these two points of entry. This configuration played an important part in the intimidation and abuse of church members on June 16, 1964 when two groups of Klansmen positioned themselves at each end of the drive.

After the burning of the church that evening, services continued to be held on site under the tall trees at the northern end of the property. This tree canopy survives and provided the space for the first commemorative service held in late August of 1964, and then as worship space for the congregation in good weather during the process of rebuilding their church. The current building sits on the same spot as the church burned in 1964. A fire in 1971 caused some damage to the church building. The walls survived the fire, but a new roof had to be built. Some interior finishes needed replacement. However, the pews and altar furniture were all saved.

A sign panel set in a brick frame is set at a high point over looking County Road 747. The bricks appear similar in size and color to those used in the church.

Two cenotaphs commemorating the three slain civil rights workers appear on the site. Closest to the church is placed the c. 1980 marker of composed of a peaked slab of polished set on an ashlar granite base. The inscription is composed of three open books with the names, along with the

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birth and death dates of each man. Each book has placed above it an oval porcelain portrait. These are all placed over the words "In Memory Of" near the base. The second cenotaph appears to be of older vintage and is placed closer to the ditch between the church property and Rd 747 at the northern edge of the parcel. Also of polished granite, the inscription states, "This Memorial Is Prayerfully And Proudly Dedicated To the Memory of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner Who Gave Their Lives In The Struggle To Obtain Human Rights For All People." Both cenotaphs display the evidence of the ephemeral Eastern European Jewish custom of leaving a stone on the grave marker as evidence of a visit.

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History administers a program of placing historical markers at the request of sponsors who bear the cost of its placement. The marker is of standard design of a green background with gold letters with a magnolia blossom emblem peak of the surrounding frame. Titled "Freedom Summer Murders," this marker was placed at this location in 1989 with the dedication plaque on the pole stating it was "donated by the listeners of WKXI, Jackson, MS." A second marker, the defaced "Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner Murder Site" marker, originally placed in 2008, is being curated by the church. The marker displays defacement including the forcible removal of the magnolia emblem from the center and the more typical bullet dings suffered by historical markers in rural areas. The historical marker for the event was replaced in 2013 on its site at the intersection of State Route 16 and Rock Cut Road, near the site of the murders in 1964.

The landscape is a contributing site.

Prince Hall Masonic Lodge (Non-Contributing)

The Mt. Zion Lodge #185 of the Prince Hall Masons is a two story frame building moved to the site of the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church to insure its preservation. The lodge dates to the 1920 but the date of this building is unknown. It displays modern materials used for siding repair, some replacement windows and doors, and an agricultural metal roof. The building was moved to this location in the early part of the 21st century and many of the repairs date to the push to ready the site for the influx of visitors to the fiftieth anniversary commemoration in 2014.

8. Statement of Significance

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

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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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

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SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

Period of Significance

1964-1968

Significant Dates

1964, 1966

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Joe Lyon, Builder

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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.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church is nationally significant for its association with Social History and Ethnic Heritage: Black for the role it played in the summer of 1964, when white supremacists burned the church with the intent of attracting civil rights workers to Neshoba County, and subsequently murdered the three men who arrived to investigate. The killing of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman was a signal event in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement and Mt. Zion Methodist Church remains as one of the most important sites associated with the events of the summer of 1964.

The Mt. Zion congregation rebuilt their church on the same site in 1966 (with repairs in 1971 after a non-arson fire) and it stands a symbol of the response to the violence of those who opposed freedom and equality for all people. Even before the completion of the new church building, Mt. Zion Methodist Church began a yearly memorial honoring Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman and others who gave their lives in the struggle. The rebuilt church is locally significant in the context of the rebuilding period for African American churches across the South after arson fires burned their previous sanctuaries. Concentrated in the 1960s, the rebuilding period stretches to about 1980, as congregations made a statement by rebuilding on their historic property in building programs that often took several years or even decades to complete and often involved funding from philanthropic organizations.

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

Neshoba County is located in east central Mississippi, about 70 miles northeast of Jackson, the state capital. At the time of European contact, the territory now comprising Neshoba County was occupied by the Choctaw. Through a series of treaties, culminating in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, the Choctaw ceded all their lands east of the Mississippi River to the United States. Many Choctaw were removed to lands in the current day state of Oklahoma. However, some members of the tribe chose to remain in Mississippi and are now organized as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw, with the population centered on a reservation primarily located in Neshoba County.

Early white settlers lived among the Choctaw, beginning in the 1820s. Colonel James Wilson is believed to be the first registered owner of land in the county. He travelled through the area in

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1832 as an appraiser of Indian lands, noting his choice. After the legislature created Neshoba County in 1833, Wilson filed claims with the federal land office.¹

The name Neshoba is derived from the Choctaw word for “wolf.”²

Due the poor quality of soil, large scale plantation agriculture never developed in Neshoba County. However, enslaved people made up a percentage of the population ever since the formation of the county. Although no census records exist prior to 1840, an old map showed the population in 1837 consisted of 638 whites and 313 enslaved people,³ with the number of enslaved people increasing to 1135 by 1850, representing about one-fourth of the population. By 1860, just before the Civil War, the percentage of the population held in slavery was twenty-six percent.⁴

Mt. Zion Methodist Church Established

After the end of the Civil War and with emancipation, recently freed people faced new economic challenges. Some moved to cities, like Jackson or Vicksburg, seeking employment. Some entered into sharecropping agreements while others were able to purchase their own farms. In the Longdale community, about eight miles east of Philadelphia, the Neshoba County seat, freed people began farming their own land in about 1870. Thomas Jones was born into slavery in Alabama and, according to family legend, escaped to Mississippi in 1862 or 1863. By 1870, Jones and his wife, Harriet, appeared on a register of Neshoba County residents. In 1879, they purchased 60 acres of farmland for \$124 from W. D. Seales, a white landowner, becoming the first African Americans to file a property deed in Longdale.⁵ During the 1880s, other freed blacks purchased land from Seales or other white landowners and Longdale became the center of several African American communities in Neshoba County.

Residents recognized the need for a church to anchor the community. James Lynch, an African American pastor, and A. C. McDonald, a white pastor, were leaders of the biracial Mississippi Methodist Conference during Reconstruction. They were committed to a “colorblind church.” To further that end, they established a church and school in Meridian, Mississippi, which trained circuit riders to assist communities of freed people to establish churches. According to author

¹ Jennelle B. Yates and Theresa T. Rideout, eds. *Red Clay Hills of Neshoba, Roots, Reflections-Ramblings, The Early History of Neshoba County, Mississippi*. (Philadelphia, MS: The Neshoba County Historical Society, 1992), 15.

² Yates and Rideout, 19.

³ Yates and Rideout, 42.

⁴ Yates and Rideout, 50.

⁵ Carol V. R. George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi: Methodists, Murder and Racial Justice in Neshoba County*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

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Carol V. R. George, "it was through some such serendipitous connection that the Methodist congregation in Longdale evolved."⁶

Thomas Jones donated land for Longdale's first church which was little more than a brush arbor. Julius Anderson, another local farmer, donated additional land and the men of the community erected a log church.⁷ In 1899, the community built a new church, described by a local observer as "a frame lap-board church."⁸ Known as Mt. Zion, the congregation worshipped in this building until the summer of 1964.

The residents of Longdale recognized the importance of education. Shortly after the construction of the log church, they built the Mt Zion school south of the building, which was used until 1920. The school moved to a former commissary building and in 1935, local farmers pledged a portion of their cotton crop to finance the construction of a new public. The school only went through the eighth grade so students desiring a high school education were forced to go to Meridian or other communities. In 1946, the residents, together with the residents of nearby Poplar Springs, formed the Longdale Consolidated School District. They borrowed \$7000 and received \$5000 from the state to construct the Longdale High School and a teacher's house. In 1963, Longdale High School and Hopewell High School, another black school, were consolidated to form George Washington Carver High School in Philadelphia.⁹

During the early years of the settlement of the Longdale community, many of the African American men were registered voters. The official election district register showed Thomas Jones, Julius Anderson, and about ten other men continuing to vote into the 1880s.¹⁰ However, following the adoption of the 1890 state constitution which enacted literacy tests for voter registration, the number of African American registered voters dropped dramatically throughout the state, including Neshoba County. By the early 1960s, local voter registration officials reported that only a small number of blacks were registered to vote, and that none of them had voted in recent elections.¹¹

Despite this, residents of Longdale continued to seek the vote. In 1947, Buford Johnson recruited several members of the Mt. Zion and Poplar Springs congregations to form a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). After initially meeting in adjacent Kemper County, the men began to meet in the Longdale school.¹² In 1952, five men from Mt. Zion, Henry and Mose Calloway, Threefoot Cole, Ross Jones and Melvin Kirkland, filled out the voter registration forms in the circuit clerk's office, but were not entered in the

⁶ George, 19.

⁷ George, 25.

⁸ Florence Mars. *Witness in Philadelphia*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 154.

⁹ Inez Calloway Johnson. "History of Longdale High School, 1949-1963." Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹⁰ George, 24.

¹¹ Mars, 59.

¹² Mars, 162.

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voting rolls. Cornelius Steele attempted to register yearly between 1952 and 1956 and was repeatedly told that the clerk had not “started letting Negroes register yet.”¹³

COFO Established

These local efforts were consistent with the era described by historian Dr. Denoral Davis as “pre-movement.” Davis wrote,

In Mississippi, the Civil Rights Movement began slowly and developed unevenly across the state. Civil rights activity in Mississippi before 1955 can best be described as scattered episodes of protest against the denial of voting rights to blacks. The pre-movement years, from World War II to the mid-1950s, are noteworthy for the early, though often isolated, civil rights activism they fostered.¹⁴

Davis cited the Progressive Voter’s League and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership as the most active pre-movement organizations in Mississippi. However, after 1955, the state NAACP became the leading organization working for civil rights in Mississippi. By 1961, national civil rights organizations including the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were all active in Mississippi.

Some Mississippi civil rights activists recognized the need for the coordination of the efforts of these organizations. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), originally created by Aaron Henry, president of the state NAACP to bring together black leaders for a meeting with Governor Ross Barnett, was reorganized in February 1962 as the central organization that incorporated all the national, state and local groups in the state. COFO included the state NAACP, led by Henry and Medgar Evers, SNCC led by Bob Moses and CORE, led by Dave Dennis. The SCLC and local groups like the Holmes County Voters League were affiliated with COFO. Responsibilities for COFO activities in the state’s congressional districts were assigned to the different organizations, with CORE assigned the state’s fourth congressional district, which included Neshoba County.¹⁵

COFO programs concentrated on two related areas. The primary focus was on voter registration. COFO planned voter education programs to assist African Americans in negotiating the arcane registration process intentionally designed to deny them access to the ballot. COFO also planned programs described as “educational and social.” These included Freedom Schools aimed at high-school aged students. COFO also planned to establish a network of community centers which

¹³ Mars, 163.

¹⁴ Denoral Davis. “When Youth Protest: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1970.” *Mississippi History Now*, <http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/articles/60/the-mississippi-civil-rights-movement-1955-1970-when-youth-protes.> (accessed August 3, 2016).

¹⁵ John Dittmer. *Local People, The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 119-120.

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would provide job training, literacy programs, medical and legal services and libraries, as well as recreational facilities often unavailable in many African American communities. However, COFO's promotional materials made clear that

COFO's primary objective remains in the area of voter education, because it is only by the creation of a broadly-based and informed electorate that Mississippi's system of racial oppression can be destroyed ultimately.¹⁶

To staff these programs, COFO relied on SNCC and CORE field representatives. They recruited local activists, some of whom became paid staff members. To augment field staff, COFO created the Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer. In a document entitled "Prospectus for the Summer," COFO announced,

a program is being planned for this summer which will involve the massive participation of Americans dedicated to the elimination of racial oppression. Scores of students, teachers, professors, ministers, technicians, artists and local advisors are now being recruited from All over the country to work in Mississippi this summer... [We are organizing] structured programs which will put to creative use the talents and energies of the hundreds of expected summer volunteers.¹⁷

The Freedom Summer volunteers would work in four areas: Freedom Schools, community centers, voter registration and special projects.

Meridian COFO Established

Mississippi's fourth congressional district, including Neshoba County, was assigned to CORE. Dave Dennis, the Mississippi CORE coordinator, sent Matt Suarez, a CORE member from New Orleans, to open a COFO office in Meridian in the fall of 1963. Suarez opened the office in January 1964 on the second floor of Fielder's Pharmacy in downtown Meridian. He recruited local activists, including James Chaney, to staff the office. However, additional personnel were required to establish a voter registration program and a community center. Dennis appealed to the national CORE office in New York, who selected Michael and Rita Schwerner as field staff workers in November 1963. Mickey was a social worker and Rita, a teacher, and both were members of CORE. When they arrived in Mississippi in January 1964, along with Dick Jewett, another New York CORE member, they became the first full-time white civil rights workers in Mississippi.¹⁸

¹⁶ "What is COFO?" Social Action vertical folder, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁷ "Prospectus for the Summer." Social Action vertical folder. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁸ Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid, The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 260.

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After meeting with COFO leaders Bob Moses and Dave Dennis, the Schwerners went to Meridian to take over the programs begun by Matt Saurez and to organize the community center. They arrived in Meridian on January 21, 1964 and by the end of February the community center opened. It had a library with 10,000 volumes and a game room, and Mickey Schwerner began teaching voter education classes. Along with James Chaney, who usually drove, he began meeting with black leaders in Newton, Kemper and Clarke counties. Chaney, one of Suarez's first volunteers, became a paid CORE staff member in April 1964.

White Resistance

By the 1960s, Mississippi had a long tradition of enforcing racial segregation through legal and extralegal means. Whether based on statutory prescriptions, social mores, economics or a philosophy of racial supremacy and inferiority, the caste system permeated almost all aspects of life. The pervasive segregation was supported by the law, matters of racial etiquette and, ultimately, racial terrorism. Historian Neil R. McMillen wrote,

If the tenor of everyday race relations was generally even, the threat of physical aggression was nevertheless ever present. When violence shattered the racial calm, some whites deplored it and many attributed its "excesses" to ungovernable redneck passions. But white Mississippians of every class seemed to regard coercive acts against erring black individuals as object lessons of universal benefit to the subordinate race. A judicious flogging here-and, in extreme circumstances, an isolated lynching there-allayed white anxieties by reaffirming the color line and striking fear into black hearts.¹⁹

As the Civil Rights Movement progressed after World War II, white resistance in Mississippi became more focused and organized. The United States Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 striking down the concept of separate-but-equal schools, a bedrock foundation of racial segregation, marked a change in the tactics of white supremacists, "plunging Mississippi into a period of violent interracial conflict unmatched since the bloody years of the 1870s."²⁰

The Citizen's Council, an organization formed by white business leaders in the summer of 1954 and dedicated to maintaining segregated schools in the Delta, grew to over 25,000 dues-paying members, including members of the state legislature and local officials.²¹ Citizen's Council members controlled the jobs, leases, and loans for thousands of African Americans and punished activities such as NAACP membership or attempts to register to vote by economic intimidation.

The Mississippi Legislature created the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission in 1956, whose purpose was "to prevent encroachment upon the rights of this or other states by the Federal

¹⁹ Neil R. McMillen. *Dark Journey, Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 29.

²⁰ Dittmer, 34.

²¹ Dittmer, 45-46.

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Government.”²² It became in effect a secret police force engaged in surveillance, wiretapping and espionage on Mississippi citizens, gathering files on 10,000 people. The Sovereignty Commission conducted surveillance in the Longdale community as early as 1957, based on rumors of secret NAACP meetings.²³

The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan also contributed to the growth of violence against African Americans. The Klan had not been active in Mississippi since the 1930s. However, beginning in 1963, Klansmen burned crosses across the state. They were involved in firebombings, shootings, beatings and murder. The White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan became the most prominent and most violent Klan group in Mississippi. At a meeting in Brookhaven in February 1964, the organization adopted a forty page constitution with a plan of four stages, called “projects.” Culminating in Project 4 labelled “Extermination.” Sam Bowers, the Imperial Wizard, identified the White Knight’s mission as the destruction of the Mississippi civil rights movement.²⁴

Meridian, where Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney were busy organizing COFO programs, was the county seat of Lauderdale County, and also the home a flourishing klavern. Edgar Ray Killen, a lifelong resident of Neshoba County, held the office of “kleagle,” or recruiter for the White Knights and planned to extend the Klan activities into Neshoba County. Mickey Schwerner soon became an object of Klan attention. Everything about Schwerner fueled the Klan’s hatred. He was from New York, he was Jewish, and he and his wife associated with African Americans. Even Schwerner’s facial hair, which earned him the Klan sobriquet “Goatee,” offended them. Meridian Klansman hatched a plan to kill Schwerner. In May, Imperial Wizard Bowers told several members that “Goatee” was a “thorn in the side of everyone living, especially white people” and that he “should be taken care of.”²⁵

Freedom Summer and Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Although likely aware of the Klan threats, Schwerner and Chaney regularly travelled to Neshoba County, searching for sites for a Freedom School. During April and May, they met with several members of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in their homes to discuss the church’s role in Freedom Summer. With its rural location and its connection to a network of other African American churches in the area, it seemed an ideal candidate. The congregation invited Schwerner and Dave Dennis to address them in the church on May 31, 1964. Although there were some opposed, the majority of the congregation approved the project.

The COFO workers’ visits to Longdale and Mt. Zion Church did not escape the notice of the local Klan. The State Sovereignty Commission sent local sheriffs and police chiefs a description of Schwerner, the COFO vehicle, and its license tag.²⁶ On the evening of June 16, 1964, Mt.

²² Dittmer, 60.

²³ George, 109.

²⁴ Dittmer, 217.

²⁵ Cagin and Dray, 266.

²⁶ Dittmer, 251.

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Zion's lay leaders held a routine meeting. Coincidentally, that same night, the Lauderdale Klan and Neshoba Klan were meeting in the old Blomo school. Former Neshoba County Sheriff "Hop" Bennett reported to the assembled Klan members that he had noticed "heavily guarded" activity at the Mt. Zion church.²⁷ Klan members, probably hoping to find the COFO workers, set up road blocks on either side on Mt. Zion.

Cornelius Steele, leaving the church meeting, was stopped by armed men and asked where the "white boys" were. After hearing a gunshot, the men allowed Steele to leave unharmed. However, Bud and Beatrice Cole, who left the church going the other way, were not so fortunate. Armed men ordered Bud Cole out of his car, asking about "the guards." The men then beat Cole resulting in a broken jaw. Beatrice Cole believed one of the men was a police officer. The men also beat Georgia Rush, another church member, who suffered a broken collarbone.²⁸

After the attack at Mt. Zion, the Klan members returned to Blomo. The Lauderdale Klan members, responsible for beating Cole and Rush, challenged the Neshoba Klan members, who had allowed Steele to leave unharmed. According to one account, "the Neshobans' vanity had been wounded...After the meeting broke up, several of the men went drinking, then drove back up Highway 16 to the Longdale road and set fire to the Mt. Zion church."²⁹ No one was ever charged with burning the church.³⁰ Edgar Ray Killen later boasted that the church was burned to lure Mickey Schwerner back to Lauderdale County.³¹

Members of the Mt. Zion community learned the church was burned the next morning. Beatrice Cole had notice light coming from the vicinity of the church in the early morning hours of June 17 and was concerned the church was being burned. Dora Cuttenhead, Beatrice's mother, visited the church that morning finding it completely destroyed with only the bricks and stones from the foundation and the tin from the roof remaining.³²

Mississippi Burning

When the Mt. Zion Church was burned, Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney were in Ohio where orientation for Freedom Summer volunteers was being conducted. However, when Schwerner returned to Mississippi, he and James Chaney went to Neshoba County on June 21, 1964, to interview witnesses and visit the site of the burned church. Andrew Goodman, a new Freedom Summer volunteer from New York, accompanied the men. They met with Cornelius Steele, Georgia Rush and the Coles and visited the ruins of the church. As the three COFO workers planned to return to Meridian, they made a fatal error. Rather than travelling the back roads, they chose to return on the state highway that ran through Philadelphia.

²⁷ George, 131.

²⁸ Mars, 169-170, 173.

²⁹ Cagin and Dray, 39.

³⁰ George, 132.

³¹ Cagin and Dray, 39.

³² Mars, 171-172.

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Chaney was driving, and as the car entered Philadelphia, Deputy Cecil Price stopped them for speeding. Assisted by two state troopers, Price took all three men into custody and transferred them to the Neshoba County jail. While the COFO workers were in jail, Price sent word to Edgar Ray Killen that he had found Goatee. The Klansmen agreed that Price would hold Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman in the county jail until dark when he would release them. Killen arranged for his co-conspirators to intercept the COFO men on their way to Meridian.³³

According to plan, Price released the men. He and another officer followed their car as it left Philadelphia on Highway 19. Price would later insist to investigators that that was the last time he saw the three men. However, Price was soon pursuing the COFO station wagon as it neared the Lauderdale County line on Highway 19, accompanied by two other cars filled with Klansmen. As Price's car closed on them, Chaney initially accelerated, but then for reasons still unknown, Chaney brought the car to a stop.³⁴

Price ordered the three men into the rear seat of his police car. When Chaney was perceived to hesitate, Price struck him in the head with a blackjack. Then the three cars, Price's police car, a second Klan car, and the COFO station wagon driven by one of the Klansmen, convoyed to Rock Cut Road, an area described as "dark, quiet and obscure."³⁵

Wayne Roberts pulled Mickey Schwerner from the car. He then shot him in the chest. Roberts returned to the car and pulled Andrew Goodman to his feet, then shot him in the chest. James Jordan then shot James Chaney in the abdomen. Roberts fired at the same time, striking Chaney in the back and as Chaney lay in the gulley, he fired a shot into his head.³⁶

The Klansmen placed the bodies in the rear of the station wagon. They drove to a farm locally known as the Old Jolley Place where a cattle pond with an earthen dam was under construction. Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman were buried at the base of the dam under mounds of red-streaked gray clay.³⁷

44 Days

When Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman had not returned to Meridian, at about 4:00pm, COFO workers contacted the state office in Jackson to report the delay. They were told to wait another hour to begin emergency procedures. Local and state workers began calling jails and hospitals to see if the men were there. Although COFO telephone records show a call to the Neshoba County jail, the jailors later denied speaking to anyone from COFO. Unable to locate the men, COFO

³³ Cagin and Dray, 10-12; 279.

³⁴ Cagin and Dray, 287; 289-290.

³⁵ Cagin and Dray, 292-293.

³⁶ Cagin and Dray, 294-295.

³⁷ Cagin and Dray, 299.

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volunteers contacted FBI agents and attorneys at the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department.³⁸

Repeat calls to the county jails the following morning finally reached the wife of the Neshoba County jailor, who told the COFO volunteer that the three men had been in the jail, paid a \$20.00 fine and had been released about 6:00pm the previous day. Continued calls to the Justice Department finally paid off when the New Orleans office of the FBI sent agents to assist the search for the missing civil rights workers.³⁹

Philadelphia's white community did not respond well to the increased federal scrutiny, or the droves of national reporters who came to the town. A prevailing attitude in the community was that the entire episode, beginning with the burning of Mt. Zion Church up to the disappearance of the three COFO workers, was a hoax, perpetrated by outside agitators.⁴⁰ Joseph Lelyveld a reporter for the *New York Times Magazine* related an incident where a crowd of residents threatened him and a photographer.⁴¹

On June 22, based on a tip from the Choctaw Reservation superintendent, FBI agents found the COFO car in a wooded area in Bogue Chitto. The car was completely burned down to the metal frame. By June 25, the FBI was joined by three busloads of sailors who searched the swamps and wooded areas of Neshoba County. FBI searchers began dragging operations in the Pearl River. When all of these searches failed to produce any evidence related to the three missing men the FBI redirected their efforts. One FBI agent later said, "as we exhausted that type of thing...I became satisfied that we would ultimately solve this case by conducting an investigation rather than a search. The target was the Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan."⁴²

The FBI found few citizens in Neshoba County willing to assist their investigation, and members of the Klan maintained their silence. Perhaps the biggest break in the case came at the end of July. An unnamed informant identified the site where the bodies of the three men were buried. On August 1, FBI agents began a meticulous excavation and found the remains of all three missing men.⁴³

Conspiracy Trial

The discovery of the bodies shook the confidence of the White Knights, and the wall of silence broke down. The FBI began to develop informants with knowledge of Klan activities. More importantly, James Jordan, a participant in the murder of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman,

³⁸ Cagin and Dray, 42-44.

³⁹ Cagin and Dray, 318-319; 325.

⁴⁰ Mars, 87-88.

⁴¹ Joseph Lelyveld. "A Stranger in Philadelphia, Mississippi." *New York Times Magazine*, December 27, 1964. P. 36.

⁴² Cagin and Dray, 338; 362; 364-365.

⁴³ Cagin and Dray, 394-400.

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confessed and provided details of the events of June 21, but denied being present when the men were killed.⁴⁴

Although the FBI investigation proceeded, Justice Department officials still had to find a way to charge the Klan members. Murder was not a federal offense at the time. Justice Department lawyers relied on a Reconstruction-era law, the Civil Rights Act of 1870, which provided for the prosecution of persons who deprived others of their civil rights.⁴⁵

In January 1965, a federal grand jury in Jackson indicted the Neshoba County conspirators. Federal Judge Harold Cox dismissed the charges, but the United States Supreme Court reinstated the charges in March 1966. A new grand jury in 1967 reindicted the conspirators, including Neshoba County Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, Deputy Cecil Price, Klan Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers and thirteen others.⁴⁶

Then trial began on October 7, 1967, in U.S. District Court in Meridian, Mississippi. The jury returned guilty verdicts against Cecil Price, Sam Bowers and five other. They returned not guilty verdicts against Sheriff Rainey and seven others. The jury could not reach a verdict for three defendants, including Edgar Ray Killen. Authors Seth Cagin and Philip Dray noted

The October 20, 1967, conviction of Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price and six of his codefendants marked the first successful jury convictions of white officials and Klansmen in the history of Mississippi for crimes against black people or civil rights workers.⁴⁷

Justice Delayed

Although the trial found some of the Klansmen guilty, Edgar Ray Killen remained free. Beginning in the 1990s, Mississippi prosecutors brought charges against several prominent defendants for crimes committed during the civil rights era. A jury convicted Byron de la Beckwith for the assassination of Medgar Evers in 1964. Sam Bowers was convicted for his involvement in the murder of Vernon Dahmer in 1966. A Humphreys County jury found three men guilty of the 1959 murder of Rainey Pool, while a federal jury convicted Ernest Avants of the 1966 murder of Ben Chester White.⁴⁸ In 1999, Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore reopened the case against Killen for the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman. A Neshoba County grand jury indicted Killen for the three murders in June 2005, and he went to trial in Philadelphia in July. The jury found Killen guilty of three counts of manslaughter, and the judge sentenced him to three twenty year terms, to be served consecutively.⁴⁹ Killen remains in prison in 2017.

⁴⁴ Cagin and Dray, 428-433.

⁴⁵ Cagin and Dray, 434.

⁴⁶ Cagin and Dray, 441-443.

⁴⁷ Cagin and Dray, 451.

⁴⁸ Howard Ball. *Justice in Mississippi, The Trial of Edgar Ray Killen*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), p. 56.

⁴⁹ Ball, 176-177.

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Mt. Zion Methodist Church Rebuilt

After Mt. Zion Methodist Church was burned on June 16, 1964, the community resolved to rebuild. The congregation received financial support from the Central Jurisdictional Methodist Conference, the body that governed black Methodist churches in Mississippi, which provided an \$8000 loan. Members raised \$1600.⁵⁰ The Committee of Concern, a biracial group of interdenominational religious leaders, gave \$5000. The Committee of Concern was organized by Dr. William Davis, secretary of the Mississippi Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in September 1964. Davis met with members of St. Matthew Baptist Church in Rankin County after their church was burned in August 1964 and was inspired by the congregation's intent to rebuild.⁵¹ The Committee of Concern, composed of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, both black and white, raised nearly \$130,000 over 28 months and provided assistance to 42 churches in Mississippi.⁵²

The white First Methodist Church in Philadelphia organized a fund-raising effort. However, the Mt. Zion church declined the donation when the gift was made contingent on the agreement that the building would never be used for anything other than church activities. Cornelius Steele, the chairman of the Mt. Zion fundraising committee told Florence Mars that the congregation was not interested in surrendering control of the church in return for white support.⁵³ Work began on the new church in the summer of 1965, culminating in a February 1966 dedication. Even this victory over the Klan was marred when Joe Lyon, the president of the local NAACP and the contractor for the new church, had a cross burned on his lawn.⁵⁴

On June 21 1965, the first anniversary of the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, a memorial service was held on the grounds of Mt. Zion. Following the murders, COFO had established an office in Philadelphia, and about 75 people, mostly local Neshoba County blacks, marched from the COFO office to Mt. Zion. Florence Mars noted this was the first time blacks had ever marched in Neshoba County.⁵⁵ This began an annual tradition that continues to this day.

Historic Significance of Mt. Zion Methodist Church

The Mt. Zion Methodist Church in rural Neshoba County, Mississippi, built in 1899, burned in 1964, and rebuilt in 1966 was at the epicenter of an arc of events in the spring and summer of

⁵⁰ Mars, 176, 178.

⁵¹ James Silver. *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.: 1966), 286-287.

⁵² Oren Renick. "'The Great Adventure,' A Comprehensive Study of Mississippi Baptist Work With The Negro Through the Committee of Concern and the Department of Work With Negroes." (M.A. thesis, Mississippi College, 1967) 112.

⁵³ Mars, 180.

⁵⁴ Mars, 280.

⁵⁵ Mars, 183.

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1964 that drew international attention to Mississippi. But its story also encompasses the great period of rebuilding that occurred in African American churches during and after the Civil Rights period. As such, the church stands today not only as a symbol of the struggle of African Americans to achieve civil rights, defined by the National Park Service's National Historic Landmark Program as the "greatest mass movement in modern American history,"⁵⁶ but also of these congregations' resiliency and dedication to place as they made a tangible statement that they would not be moved from their land. The church represents the hopes and aspirations of freed people in the years following the Civil War, their experience in the Jim Crow era, the methods and tactics employed by civil rights organizers, the depth of white resistance to legal equality for African Americans, and the determination to rebuild in defiance of racial violence.

As the modern civil rights movement evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, the eyes of the nation were drawn to local events across the country including the Freedom Riders in Anniston, Alabama, a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. So it was in the summer of 1964 when battalions of college students traveled to Mississippi to work with local organizers on voter registration and education programs. Journalist Bruce Watson wrote of Freedom Summer,

Before it was over, all of America would focus on Mississippi, TV and newspapers would tar and feather the state. Hundreds of doctors, lawyers, and clergymen would come to help student volunteers. Folksingers, Hollywood stars, and Martin Luther King himself would flock to Mississippi, where whiplash violence was shredding the social contract. Thirty-five churches would be torched, five dozen houses and Freedom houses would be bombed, and Mississippi would become synonymous with murder.⁵⁷

When Mt. Zion Methodist Church members were attacked and the church burned, the local media paid little attention. However, the newspaper in New Orleans reported the story. When Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman disappeared on June 21, the *New York Times* carried the story on page one.⁵⁸ As the FBI searched for the three men, President Lyndon Johnson met with Andrew Goodman's parents and Mickey Schwerner's father in the White House. Walter Cronkite, in a one-hour CBS News broadcast, reported that the whole country was watching Mississippi. NBC News broadcast a two-hour special report on the search for the men. On July 24, accompanied by the national press corps, Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Philadelphia and the ruins of Mt. Zion Methodist Church, where he told members of the congregation, "I feel sorry for those who were hurt by this, [but] I rejoice that there are churches relevant enough that

⁵⁶ National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*, National Park Service, 2002, rev 2008, p. 17

⁵⁷ Bruce Watson. *Freedom Summer, The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 13.

⁵⁸ Taylor Branch. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 365.

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people of ill will will be willing to burn them.”⁵⁹ As the search for the three men continued, the media attention waned. But when the bodies of the three men were found on August 4, the national media returned to Neshoba County.

During Freedom Summer, COFO organized the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party and planned to challenge the seating of the regular Mississippi Democratic delegation at the national party convention in Atlantic City. Although the challenge was rejected, national attention was once again focused on Mississippi when Fannie Lou Hamer testified before the party’s Credential Committee, where she invoked the memory of the assassination of Medgar Evers, James Meredith’s battle to enroll at the University of Mississippi, and the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman.⁶⁰ The MDFP arrived in Atlantic City towing a replica of the COFO worker’s burnt-out car.⁶¹

Almost every history of the modern civil rights movement includes an account of the murders. Documentary filmmakers have produced numerous films about the events of the summer of 1964 in Neshoba County. These include an episode of the Peabody Award-winning documentary *Eyes on the Prize, America’s Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985*, originally broadcast on the Public Broadcasting System’s series *American Experience*. Filmmakers Micki Dickoff and Tony Pagano produced *Neshoba: The Price of Freedom* in 2010, which *New York Times* film critic A. O. Scott reported “focusses on one of the most notorious and terrible incidents of the 1960s and its long aftermath.”⁶² Even Hollywood has addressed the incident in the fictionalized 1988 movie *Mississippi Burning*.

Less dramatic, but as important, is the active agency the congregation took in rebuilding their church on its historic location, and in doing so, tangibly demonstrating the determined continuity of rural African American communities. When the Mt. Zion congregation rebuilt their church in 1966, they testified to the world that violence, arson, and even murder, would not deter the quest for equality or undermine their rights to their land.

Comparables

The church remains the best physical site to memorialize the events of the summer of 1964. The Community Development Partnership, a coalition of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the Industrial Development Authority of Neshoba County, the Tourism Council, and the Philadelphia Main Street Association, produced the Neshoba County African-American Driving Tour and a pamphlet titled *Roots of Struggle, Rewards of Sacrifice*. The map directs visitors to the places associated with the murder of the three civil rights workers. These include the

⁵⁹ Cagin and Dray, 381.

⁶⁰ Juan William. *Eyes on the Prize, America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987), 241.

⁶¹ Branch, 457.

⁶² A. O. Scott. “A Long Hot Summer in Mississippi That Still Burns.” *New York Times*, August 10, 2010.

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Neshoba County jail, where Cecil Price held the men while the Klan organized their attack; Rock Cut Road where a marker memorializes the site where the Klansmen executed their victims; the Bogue Chitto Swamp, where authorities discovered the burnt-out car ; and the Earthen Dam where the Klan buried the men. The tour map also leads visitors to the Mt. Zion Methodist Church which includes memorials Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman. The Rock Cut Road and the Bogue Chitto Swamp remain largely as they were in 1964, with little to remind a visitor of the events that occurred there. The Earthen Dam is on private property with No Trespassing signs posted. The Neshoba County Jail has been altered over time, and in 2007, the National Park Service removed the building from further study for landmark designation, but the jail is a contributing resource in the Downtown Philadelphia Historic District.⁶³ The Downtown Philadelphia Historic District was listed on the National Register in April 2005 with national significance for its part in the events of 1964 and as the site of two marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964 and 1966.⁶⁴

The modern national civil rights movement was marked by violent reactions from the beginning, committed by private citizens and law enforcement. Organizers, protestors, marchers, and school children were beaten, threatened with police dogs, pelted with tear gas and doused with firehoses. Opponents firebombed churches, homes and schools. The most extreme actors perpetrated murder and assassinations. The end papers of Juan William's book, *Eyes on the Prize, America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*, include timelines of events, including one titled "Violence." The first event is the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Till's murderers were brought to trial but exonerated by a jury. The trial occurred in the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi. The courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for national significance.⁶⁵ Medgar Evers, the Mississippi Field Secretary for the NAACP, was assassinated in the driveway of his Jackson home in 1963. The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a designated National Historic Landmark. When James Meredith enrolled at the University of Mississippi in 1962, white opponents to integration rioted, resulting in two deaths. The site of the riot is included in the National Historic Landmark Lyceum-The Circle Historic District⁶⁶ in Oxford, Mississippi. In September 1963, Klansmen bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four young girls. The Department of the Interior designated the church as a National Historic Landmark in 2006.⁶⁷ After Jimmie Lee Jackson, a voting rights organizer, was shot and killed by police officer in Selma, Alabama in 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC organized a march from Selma to the Alabama

⁶³ National Historic Landmark Theme Study. "Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights." National Park Service. 2007, revised 2009. P. 127

⁶⁴ National Register of Historic Places. Downtown Philadelphia Historic District, Philadelphia, Neshoba County, MS #05000280

⁶⁵ National Register of Historic Places. Tallahatchie County Courthouse (Second District), Sumner, Tallahatchie County, MS #07000149

⁶⁶ National Historic Landmark. The Lyceum-The Circle Historic District, Oxford, Lafayette County, MS. #08001092

⁶⁷ National Historic Landmark. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Jefferson County. # 8000696

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State Capitol in Montgomery. As the marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama state troopers assaulted the marchers with clubs, whips and tear gas. The event, known as Bloody Sunday, was broadcast on national television. The Edmund Pettus Bridge⁶⁸ and the Brown Chapel AME Church⁶⁹ in Selma, where the marchers began, are both National Historic Landmarks.

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⁶⁸ National Historic Landmark. Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Dallas County, AL # 13000281

⁶⁹ National Historic Landmark. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, Selma, Dallas County, AL.# 82002009

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey, Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

National Historic Landmark. The Lyceum-The Circle Historic District, Oxford, Lafayette County, MS. #08001092

National Historic Landmark. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL. # 8000696

National Historic Landmark. Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Dallas County, AL # 13000281

National Historic Landmark. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, Selma, Dallas County, AL. # 82002009

National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites.* National Park Service, 2002, revised 2008.

National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights.* National Park Service, 2007, rev. 2009.

National Register of Historic Places. Downtown Philadelphia Historic District, Philadelphia, Neshoba County, MS #05000280

National Register of Historic Places. Tallahatchie County Courthouse (Second District), Sumner, Tallahatchie County, MS #07000149

“Prospectus for the Summer.” Social Action folder. Freedom Summer Collection. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Renick, Oren. “‘The Great Adventure,’ A Comprehensive Study of Mississippi Baptist Work With the Negro Through the Committee of Concern and the Department of Work With Negroes.” M. A. Thesis, Mississippi College, 1967.

Silver, James. *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966.

Watson, Bruce. *Freedom Summer, The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. New York: Penguin Press, 2010.

“What is COFO?” Social Action vertical folder. Freedom Summer Collection. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize, America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. New York, Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987.

Yates, Jennelle B. and Theresa T. Rideout, eds. *Red Clay Hills of Neshoba, Roots, Reflections-Ramblings, The Early History of Neshoba County*. Philadelphia, MS: The Neshoba County Historic Society, 1992.

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): 099-PH1-5103.1 _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property _____ Approx 6 acres _____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 32.781389

Longitude: -89.991389

See Continuation Sheet

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church occupies Neshoba County Parcel 06700-20-017.000. It is approximately 5.6 acres, described as the Southwest 1/4 of the Southwest 1/4 of the Southeast 1/4 and East 1/2 of the Southeast 1/4 of the Southwest 1/4 of Section 20, Township 11, Range 13.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the rural parcel historically associated with Mt. Zion Methodist Church.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Rachel Krawitz, Director _____
organization: Historic Preservation Graduate Program, Delaware State University _____
street & number: 1200 N. du Pont Avenue _____
city or town: Dover _____ state: Delaware ___ zip code: 19901 _____
e-mail rkrawitz@desu.edu _____
telephone: 302-857-7139 _____
date: 12-29-2016 _____

name/title: Bill Gatlin, Architectural Historian _____
organization: Mississippi Department of Archives and History _____
street & number: 100 S. State St _____
city or town: Jackson _____ state: MS ___ zip code: 39206 _____
e-mail bgatlin@mdah.ms.gov _____

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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telephone: 601-576-6951 _____

date: 12-29-2016 _____

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.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Mt. Zion Methodist Church

City or Vicinity: Philadelphia

County: Neshoba State: Mississippi

Photographer: Jennifer Baughn, MDAH Chief Architectural Historian

Date Photographed: October 25, 2016

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

- 1 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing North.
- 2 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Southwest.
- 3 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Northeast.
- 4 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Southeast.
- 5 of 14. Sanctuary. Camera facing East.
- 6 of 14. Sanctuary window. Camera facing East.
- 7 of 14. Sanctuary. Camera facing West
- 8 of 14. Pastor's Study. Camera facing Northeast.
- 9 of 14. Office. Camera facing Southeast.
- 10 of 14. Fellowship Hall. Camera facing East.
- 11 of 14. Fellowship Hall. Camera facing West.
- 12 of 14. Cemetery. Camera facing North.
- 13 of 14. Church Bell. Camera facing North.
- 14 of 14. Masonic Lodge. Camera facing South.

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.

Historic Marker
and Monument

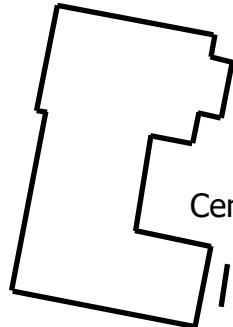
Mount Zion United Methodist Church
Philadelphia, MS

N ↑

→ Photo Number
and Direction

4 →

Mt. Zion United Methodist Church

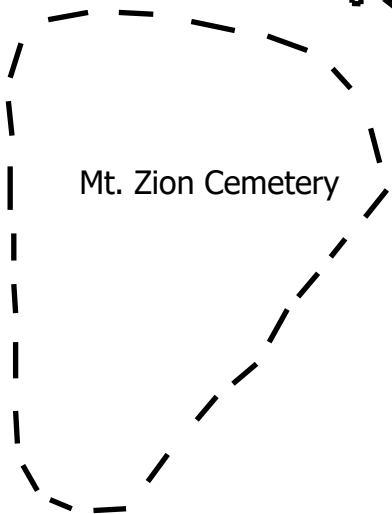


Cenotaph

Bell

3 →

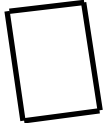
Mt. Zion Cemetery



13 →

14 ↓

Mt. Zion Masonic Lodge

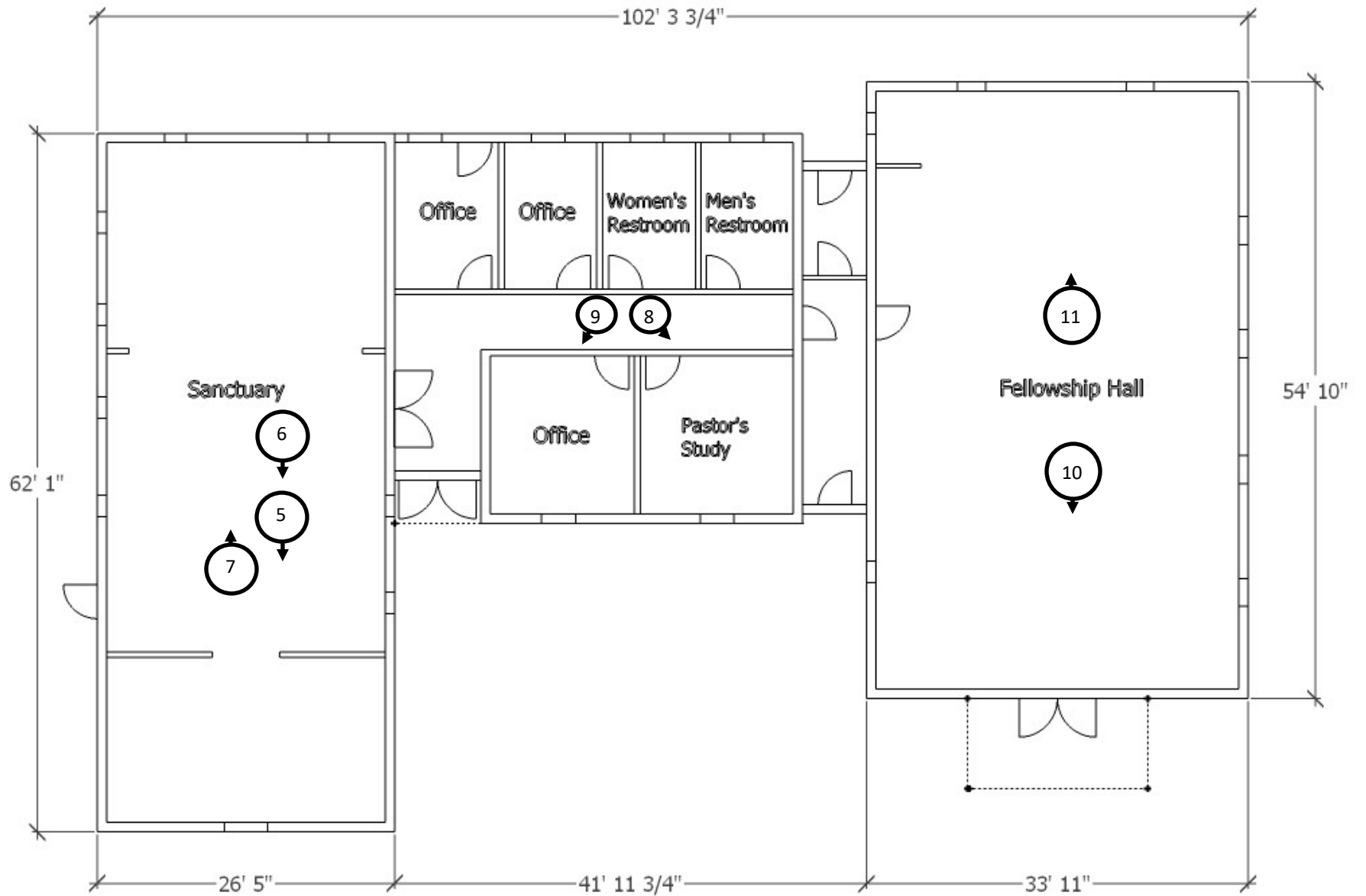


12 →

2 →

County Road 11191

1 ←



Mt. Zion United Methodist Church
 11191 Road 747
 Philadelphia vic., Neshoba Co. MS

Photo Number and Direction ← #





















LOVE IS ..









DAVID WANN
DEC. 25, 1964
OCT. 14, 1993

STEEL

MOTHER
MARIE J. WILES
MAY 10, 1914
OCT. 10, 1993

FATHER
WALTER WILES
MAY 10, 1914
OCT. 10, 1993





MT. ZION
LODGE #185
SINCE 1920



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:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 5/30/2018 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: 7/16/2018 Date of 45th Day: 7/13/2018 Date of Weekly List: 7/13/2018

Reference number:

Nominator:

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 checked="" 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 7/13/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

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

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION
Jim Woodrick, director
PO Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205-0571
601-576-6940 • Fax 601-576-6955
mdah.state.ms.us



April 17, 2017

Mr. Paul Loether
Program Director, National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Loether:

We are pleased to enclose the nomination form and supporting documents to nominate the following properties to the National Register of Historic Places:

Mt. Zion Methodist Church, Philadelphia vicinity, Neshoba County

The property was approved for nomination by the Mississippi National Register Review Board at its meeting on March 16, 2017.

We trust you will find the enclosed materials in order and will let us hear from you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Blount".

Katie Blount
State Historic Preservation Officer

By: William M. Gatlin

National Register Coordinator



56-1029

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: Mt. Zion Methodist Church _____

Other names/site number: Mt. Zion United Methodist Church _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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

2. Location

Street & number: 11191 Road 741 _____

City or town: Philadelphia _____ State: Mississippi _____ County: Neshoba _____

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:

X national ___ statewide ___ local
Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Returned

<u>Kate Blount</u>	<u>3-27-17</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>SHPO</u>	
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

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

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

Returned

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Late 20th Century Vernacular _____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Concrete Block, Asphalt shingles _____

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 on a high point of ground on the west side of Route 747 in the rural community of Longdale, Neshoba County, Mississippi, the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church Complex is composed of buildings, a site, objects, and landscape features that contribute to the historical significance of the property and retain integrity from the period of significance. The church is located approximately eight and a half miles east of the Neshoba County seat of Philadelphia. Built in 1966 and rebuilt in 1971 of brick veneered concrete block, the church and fellowship hall were constructed after a devastating KKK-perpetrated fire destroyed the older, frame church that stood on the property. The significance of this church is associated with the social history of the community of Longdale and the Civil Rights history relating to the events leading up to and the subsequent commemorations of the Freedom Summer murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman on June 21, 1964. The rebuilt church continues to be a place of commemoration of these events. The rebuilt church also fits in the context of the rebuilding period for African American churches after arson fires burned their previous sanctuaries. Concentrated in the 1960s, the period stretches to about 1980, as congregations made a statement

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

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by rebuilding on their historic property in building programs that often took several years or even decades to complete and often involved funding from philanthropic organizations. The rebuilt church and grounds retain sufficient architectural integrity to convey the history and persistence of the community that worshiped here in the face of the terrorism that was perpetrated against them.

Narrative Description

The Mt. Zion United Methodist Church is an L-shaped single story building that contains the worship space and the office wing. It is constructed of concrete block with a brick veneer laid in running bond and is surmounted by a cross gable roof covered in asphalt shingle. The long elevations, north and south, display a course of soldier course brick at the eave as a visual terminus for the wall. The three by six bay section that faces County Road 747 contains the main worship space and the tall vertical windows that light this space are all fabricated of aluminum. Interior finishes and sanctuary windows date to repairs from a 1971 fire.

Facade of Sanctuary and Office Wing

The east facade of the sanctuary section of the church projects from the plane of the wing by three bays. The sanctuary is crowned by an aluminum clad pyramid-shaped spire set on a square base that is placed at the ridge of the roof over the altar-end of the sanctuary. The bricks of the veneer are laid in running bond with four-brick groupings projecting in a regular decorative pattern on the facade consisting of two alternating vertical rows flanking the central bay. Three bays wide, the central bay is dominated by an aluminum-framed, six-paned window with a triangular pane emulating a pointed arch top. The glass appears darkened and is covered on the interior by a decorative film. The window is set in a stuccoed vertical band the width of the window that is painted white that begins at the eighth course of brick above the ground and ends at the peak of the gable. The facade of the office wing is three bays wide. The entry to the building is set recessed slightly into the facade at the bay where the office wing connects to the sanctuary. The double leaf entrance doors have four panels and above display a semi-circular window with radiating muntins. The doorway is addressed with a ramp which gently rises from the concrete sidewalk leading from the parking lot in the front of the building. A set of three concrete steps also provides access from a sidewalk that parallels the planting bed adjacent to the facade of the wing. The two additional bays of the wing contain metal 2/2 horizontal paned windows with rowlock sills and no additional trim. Foundation planting beds occur across the facade and north elevation of the sanctuary. The corner stone for the church was placed in the second bay of the office wing. White marble, it provides the following information:

"Mt. Zion U.M. Church; Built - 1893 Rebuilt- 1965; Rebuilt After Fire-1971; C. Steele-Chrmn; J.C. Cole-Sec.; W.Y. Steele- Treas.; Bldg Committee; J. Cole; R. Jones; C. Steele; C.F. Foster- Pastor; S.S. Barnett- D.S.; S.L. Webb- D.S.; M.L. Harris-Bishop; E.J. Henderson-Bishop; H.W. Williams- Pastor; Joe Lyons-[?]NTR"

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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North Elevation of the Sanctuary

Three bays of the north elevation are visible. A course of rowlock bricks are placed at the top of the wall adjacent to the eave. The two bays next to the entry are two windows that light the sanctuary. The windows date to the 1971 repairs and are a vertical composition of two sets of three single panes over two horizontal panes that extend the width of the window over a larger single pane. Each has a simple concrete sill and the area above each window displays a repair to shorten the window height.

South Elevation of the Sanctuary

The south elevation is six bays long and displays a bright metal framed multi-paned window in the four western bays, a single leaf door accessing the sanctuary in the fifth bay, and a blank sixth bay. The windows are the same that appear in the north elevation, with the same arrangement and detail. They also appear to have been changed. The single leaf door appears to be of recent vintage and has projecting panels in a cross and bible configuration. The door is set above a stoop of two concrete steps with a simple PVC pipe railing on one side. The blank bay corresponds to the altar portion of the sanctuary on the interior.

Rear of the Sanctuary and the Office Wing

The rear, or west elevation, clearly displays the end of the sanctuary portion of the building and the extension of the office wing. Seven bays in width, the two southern bays display the same metal windows that occur on the south elevation. The bricks above and below the windows are laid three brick wide stack bond. The peak of the gable end displays a louvered attic vent. The office wing extends five bays to the north from the sanctuary. Four of the five bays include 2/2 horizontal lite metal widows with a rowlock sills and no other trim. The fifth bay includes a wood door with a small single pane opening centered in the upper half of the door. The surround is plain and a single concrete step sits below. These openings are irregularly placed along this elevation.

Interior

The rectangular sanctuary is on an east-west axis, with the chancel on the eastern end separated from the congregational seating by a communion rail and elevated on a stage. The pulpit is accessed by a step, a short landing and then three more steps up to the area for the preacher on the left and the choir on the right. The chancel is lit by the multi-paned central window with its multi-colored coating. The pulpit furnishings are of light colored wood and include a lectern, and chairs, as well as green velvet covered theater seating for the choir. The communion rail on the floor flanks the first step up to the altar. The vertically laid concrete block walls are finished in white paint. The light-colored wood pews are laid out with a central aisle.

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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The congregation space is divided into two sections by an accordion divider. The larger forward section is accessed from the hallway through a double leaf swinging wood door and has beige carpeting. The smaller rear section has linoleum tile flooring and a separate entrance from the hallway. Wood trim in the space is limited to door casings, the opening between the two sections of the congregation space and a window sized opening, now filled in, that originally provided access between the adjacent office and the rear section, and was probably filled in during the 1971 repairs. This wood trim is all similarly detailed dark stained pine with simple classically inspired detailing.

The L-shaped hallway parallels the sanctuary and turns right along a double loaded corridor providing access to enclosed small offices, including the pastor's office, and rest room facilities.

Placed next to the entrance to the sanctuary is a cast metal plaque with the following text:

"Out of One Blood God Hath Made All Men; This plaque is dedicated to the memory of; Michael Schwerner; James Chaney; Andrew Goodman; Whose concern for others, and more particularly those of this community, led to their early martyrdom. Their deaths quickened men's consciences and more firmly established justice, liberty, and brotherhood in our land."

Fellowship Hall

The Fellowship Hall, constructed c. 2001, is connected to the L-shaped church and office wing by a single bay wide, frame hyphen. The hyphen encloses the formerly exterior concrete steps between the two building sections. The fellowship hall is a one story, three bay, masonry structure set on a poured concrete foundation with a frame gable roof structure. The walls are laid in a running bond. The facade of the fellowship hall faces east. The poured concrete deck is a step up from the concrete sidewalk and is centered on this elevation. The frame gabled porch roof supported by simple unadorned posts with brackets. The main exterior entrance into the social hall is a double leaf door centered on this elevation. The north elevation displays four regularly spaced windows openings with vinyl windows and rowlock sills. The rear elevation displays two irregularly placed windows of similar configuration. The south elevation displays a single bay with window of similar fabric as the rest of the windows in the social hall. The facade of the hyphen is one bay wide and has a single leaf door occupying the majority of the width of the space. The walls on the facade and rear display wide Masonite siding. The rear of the hyphen displays a metal 2/2 horizontal paned window centered on the wall.

A planting bed outlined with railroad ties is placed along the north side of the facade and continues across the north elevation.

The interior of the fellowship hall contains a full working kitchen along the west wall and an open plan space with folding tables in the remainder of the building. The walls display framed flat exhibits of historical information about the church, the community, and its history.

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Neshoba County, Mississippi

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Mt. Zion Cemetery

The John Willie Wells Cemetery at Mt. Zion Church is located to the south of the church building and occupies the hillside adjacent to the church sloping down to the treed margins to the south and west and toward County Road 747. Burials date from the earliest period of the establishment of the church. Earliest internments in the Jones family are marked with large field stones without inscriptions. Generally laid out in rows, the marked burials display monuments of stone and concrete. Some plots display concrete grave covers and some are covered with white stones, the plot outlined in brick, wood shingle, or other material. Some burials display extensive plantings over the grave. Military issued markers are also present. The cemetery is a contributing site.

The Old Mt. Zion Church Bell and Stand

The bell from the church survived the fire in 1968 and is placed on a metal stand set to southeast of the church. The yoke of the bell is marked "The C.S. Bell and Co." and was manufactured in Hillsboro, Ohio. The bell is a contributing object.

Landscape Features

The nominated parcel is triangular in shape and the church building is placed on the high spot on the parcel. Two gravel drives provide entrance to the parcel, one from the direction of Philadelphia to the west and one from the center of the Longdale community to the east. The drives are separated by ditches, limiting access to the parcel to these two points of entry. This configuration played an important part in the intimidation and abuse of church members on June 16, 1964 when two groups of Klansmen positioned themselves at each end of the drive.

After the burning of the church that evening, services continued to be held on site under the tall trees at the northern end of the property. This tree canopy survives and provided the space for the first commemorative service held in late August of 1964, and then as worship space for the congregation in good weather during the process of rebuilding their church. The current building sits on the same spot as the church burned in 1964. A fire in 1971 caused some damage to the church building. The walls survived the fire, but a new roof had to be built. Some interior finishes needed replacement. However, the pews and altar furniture were all saved.

A sign panel set in a brick frame is set at a high point over looking County Road 747. The bricks appear similar in size and color to those used in the church.

Two cenotaphs commemorating the three slain civil rights workers appear on the site. Closest to the church is placed the c. 1980 marker of composed of a peaked slab of polished set on an ashlar granite base. The inscription is composed of three open books with the names, along with the

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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birth and death dates of each man. Each book has placed above it an oval porcelain portrait. These are all placed over the words "In Memory Of" near the base. The second cenotaph appears to be of older vintage and is placed closer to the ditch between the church property and Rd 747 at the northern edge of the parcel. Also of polished granite, the inscription states, "This Memorial Is Prayerfully And Proudly Dedicated To the Memory of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner Who Gave Their Lives In The Struggle To Obtain Human Rights For All People." Both cenotaphs display the evidence of the ephemeral Eastern European Jewish custom of leaving a stone on the grave marker as evidence of a visit.

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History administers a program of placing historical markers at the request of sponsors who bear the cost of its placement. The marker is of standard design of a green background with gold letters with a magnolia blossom emblem peak of the surrounding frame. Titled "Freedom Summer Murders," this marker was placed at this location in 1989 with the dedication plaque on the pole stating it was "donated by the listeners of WKXI, Jackson, MS." A second marker, the defaced "Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner Murder Site" marker, originally placed in 2008, is being curated by the church. The marker displays defacement including the forcible removal of the magnolia emblem from the center and the more typical bullet dings suffered by historical markers in rural areas. The historical marker for the event was replaced in 2013 on its site at the intersection of State Route 16 and Rock Cut Road, near the site of the murders in 1964.

The landscape is a contributing site.

Prince Hall Masonic Lodge (Non-Contributing)

The Mt. Zion Lodge #185 of the Prince Hall Masons is a two story frame building moved to the site of the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church to insure its preservation. The lodge dates to the 1920 but the date of this building is unknown. It displays modern materials used for siding repair, some replacement windows and doors, and an agricultural metal roof. The building was moved to this location in the early part of the 21st century and many of the repairs date to the push to ready the site for the influx of visitors to the fiftieth anniversary commemoration in 2014.

8. Statement of Significance

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

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SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

Period of Significance

1964-1968

Significant Dates

1964, 1966

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Joe Lyon, Builder

Returned

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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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.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church is nationally significant for its association with Social History and Ethnic Heritage: Black for the role it played in the summer of 1964, when white supremacists burned the church with the intent of attracting civil rights workers to Neshoba County, and subsequently murdered the three men who arrived to investigate. The killing of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman was a signal event in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement and Mt. Zion Methodist Church remains as one of the most important sites associated with the events of the summer of 1964.

The Mt. Zion congregation rebuilt their church on the same site in 1966 (with repairs in 1971 after a non-arson fire) and it stands a symbol of the response to the violence of those who opposed freedom and equality for all people. Even before the completion of the new church building, Mt. Zion Methodist Church began a yearly memorial honoring Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman and others who gave their lives in the struggle. The rebuilt church is locally significant in the context of the rebuilding period for African American churches across the South after arson fires burned their previous sanctuaries. Concentrated in the 1960s, the rebuilding period stretches to about 1980, as congregations made a statement by rebuilding on their historic property in building programs that often took several years or even decades to complete and often involved funding from philanthropic organizations.

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

Neshoba County is located in east central Mississippi, about 70 miles northeast of Jackson, the state capital. At the time of European contact, the territory now comprising Neshoba County was occupied by the Choctaw. Through a series of treaties, culminating in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, the Choctaw ceded all their lands east of the Mississippi River to the United States. Many Choctaw were removed to lands in the current day state of Oklahoma. However, some members of the tribe chose to remain in Mississippi and are now organized as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw, with the population centered on a reservation primarily located in Neshoba County.

Early white settlers lived among the Choctaw, beginning in the 1820s. Colonel James Wilson is believed to be the first registered owner of land in the county. He travelled through the area in

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1832 as an appraiser of Indian lands, noting his choice. After the legislature created Neshoba County in 1833, Wilson filed claims with the federal land office.¹

The name Neshoba is derived from the Choctaw word for "wolf."²

Due the poor quality of soil, large scale plantation agriculture never developed in Neshoba County. However, enslaved people made up a percentage of the population ever since the formation of the county. Although no census records exist prior to 1840, an old map showed the population in 1837 consisted of 638 whites and 313 enslaved people,³ with the number of enslaved people increasing to 1135 by 1850, representing about one-fourth of the population. By 1860, just before the Civil War, the percentage of the population held in slavery was twenty-six percent.⁴

Mt. Zion Methodist Church Established

After the end of the Civil War and with emancipation, recently freed people faced new economic challenges. Some moved to cities, like Jackson or Vicksburg, seeking employment. Some entered into sharecropping agreements while others were able to purchase their own farms. In the Longdale community, about eight miles east of Philadelphia, the Neshoba County seat, freed people began farming their own land in about 1870. Thomas Jones was born into slavery in Alabama and, according to family legend, escaped to Mississippi in 1862 or 1863. By 1870, Jones and his wife, Harriet, appeared on a register of Neshoba County residents. In 1879, they purchased 60 acres of farmland for \$124 from W. D. Seales, a white landowner, becoming the first African Americans to file a property deed in Longdale. During the 1880s, other freed blacks purchased land from Seales or other white landowners and Longdale became the center of several African American communities in Neshoba County.

Residents recognized the need for a church to anchor the community. James Lynch, an African American pastor, and A. C. McDonald, a white pastor, were leaders of the biracial Mississippi Methodist Conference during Reconstruction. They were committed to a "colorblind church." To further that end, they established a church and school in Meridian, Mississippi, which trained circuit riders to assist communities of freed people to establish churches. According to author

¹ Jennelle B. Yates and Theresa T. Rideout, eds. *Red Clay Hills of Neshoba, Roots, Reflections-Ramblings, The Early History of Neshoba County, Mississippi*. (Philadelphia, MS: The Neshoba County Historical Society, 1992), 15.

² Yates and Rideout, 19.

³ Yates and Rideout, 42.

⁴ Yates and Rideout, 50.

⁵ Carol V. R. George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi: Methodists, Murder and Racial Justice in Neshoba County*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

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Carol V. R. George, "it was through some such serendipitous connection that the Methodist congregation in Longdale evolved."⁶

Thomas Jones donated land for Longdale's first church which was little more than a brush arbor. Julius Anderson, another local farmer, donated additional land and the men of the community erected a log church.⁷ In 1899, the community built a new church, described by a local observer as "a frame lap-board church."⁸ Known as Mt. Zion, the congregation worshipped in this building until the summer of 1964.

The residents of Longdale recognized the importance of education. Shortly after the construction of the log church, they built the Mt Zion school south of the building, which was used until 1920. The school moved to a former commissary building and in 1935, local farmers pledged a portion of their cotton crop to finance the construction of a new public. The school only went through the eighth grade so students desiring a high school education were forced to go to Meridian or other communities. In 1946, the residents, together with the residents of nearby Poplar Springs, formed the Longdale Consolidated School District. They borrowed \$7000 and received \$5000 from the state to construct the Longdale High School and a teacher's house. In 1963, Longdale High School and Hopewell High School, another black school, were consolidated to form George Washington Carver High School in Philadelphia.⁹

During the early years of the settlement of the Longdale community, many of the African American men were registered voters. The official election district register showed Thomas Jones, Julius Anderson, and about ten other men continuing to vote into the 1880s.¹⁰ However, following the adoption of the 1890 state constitution which enacted literacy tests for voter registration, the number of African American registered voters dropped dramatically throughout the state, including Neshoba County. By the early 1960s, local voter registration officials reported that only a small number of blacks were registered to vote, and that none of them had voted in recent elections.¹¹

Despite this, residents of Longdale continued to seek the vote. In 1947, Buford Johnson recruited several members of the Mt. Zion and Poplar Springs congregations to form a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). After initially meeting in adjacent Kemper County, the men began to meet in the Longdale school.¹² In 1952, five men from Mt. Zion, Henry and Mose Calloway, Threefoot Cole, Ross Jones and Melvin Kirkland, filled out the voter registration forms in the circuit clerk's office, but were not entered in the

⁶ George, 19.

⁷ George, 25.

⁸ Florence Mars. *Witness in Philadelphia*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 154.

⁹ Inez Calloway Johnson. "History of Longdale High School, 1949-1963." Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹⁰ George, 24.

¹¹ Mars, 59.

¹² Mars, 162.

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voting rolls. Cornelius Steele attempted to register yearly between 1952 and 1956 and was repeatedly told that the clerk had not "started letting Negroes register yet."¹³

COFO Established

These local efforts were consistent with the era described by historian Dr. Denoral Davis as "pre-movement." Davis wrote,

In Mississippi, the Civil Rights Movement began slowly and developed unevenly across the state. Civil rights activity in Mississippi before 1955 can best be described as scattered episodes of protest against the denial of voting rights to blacks. The pre-movement years, from World War II to the mid-1950s, are noteworthy for the early, though often isolated, civil rights activism they fostered.¹⁴

Davis cited the Progressive Voter's League and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership as the most active pre-movement organizations in Mississippi. However, after 1955, the state NAACP became the leading organization working for civil rights in Mississippi. By 1961, national civil rights organizations including the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were all active in Mississippi.

Some Mississippi civil rights activists recognized the need for the coordination of the efforts of these organizations. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), originally created by Aaron Henry, president of the state NAACP to bring together black leaders for a meeting with Governor Ross Barnett, was reorganized in February 1962 as the central organization that incorporated all the national, state and local groups in the state. COFO included the state NAACP, led by Henry and Medgar Evers, SNCC led by Bob Moses and CORE, led by Dave Dennis. The SCLC and local groups like the Holmes County Voters League were affiliated with COFO. Responsibilities for COFO activities in the state's congressional districts were assigned to the different organizations, with CORE assigned the state's fourth congressional district, which included Neshoba County.¹⁵

COFO programs concentrated on two related areas. The primary focus was on voter registration. COFO planned voter education programs to assist African Americans in negotiating the arcane registration process intentionally designed to deny them access to the ballot. COFO also planned programs described as "educational and social." These included Freedom Schools aimed at high-school aged students. COFO also planned to establish a network of community centers which

¹³ Mars, 163.

¹⁴ Denoral Davis. "When Youth Protest: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1970." *Mississippi History Now*, <http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/articles/60/the-mississippi-civil-rights-movement-1955-1970-when-youth-protes>. (accessed August 3, 2016).

¹⁵ John Dittmer. *Local People, The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 119-120.

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would provide job training, literacy programs, medical and legal services and libraries, as well as recreational facilities often unavailable in many African American communities. However, COFO's promotional materials made clear that

COFO's primary objective remains in the area of voter education, because it is only by the creation of a broadly-based and informed electorate that Mississippi's system of racial oppression can be destroyed ultimately.¹⁶

To staff these programs, COFO relied on SNCC and CORE field representatives. They recruited local activists, some of whom became paid staff members. To augment field staff, COFO created the Mississippi Summer Project, also known as Freedom Summer. In a document entitled "Prospectus for the Summer," COFO announced,

a program is being planned for this summer which will involve the massive participation of Americans dedicated to the elimination of racial oppression. Scores of students, teachers, professors, ministers, technicians, artists and local advisors are now being recruited from All over the country to work in Mississippi this summer... [We are organizing] structured programs which will put to creative use the talents and energies of the hundreds of expected summer volunteers.¹⁷

The Freedom Summer volunteers would work in four areas: Freedom Schools, community centers, voter registration and special projects.

Meridian COFO Established

Mississippi's fourth congressional district, including Neshoba County, was assigned to CORE. Dave Dennis, the Mississippi CORE coordinator, sent Matt Suarez, a CORE member from New Orleans, to open a COFO office in Meridian in the fall of 1963. Suarez opened the office in January 1964 on the second floor of Fielder's Pharmacy in downtown Meridian. He recruited local activists, including James Chaney, to staff the office. However, additional personnel were required to establish a voter registration program and a community center. Dennis appealed to the national CORE office in New York, who selected Michael and Rita Schwerner as field staff workers in November 1963. Mickey was a social worker and Rita, a teacher, and both were members of CORE. When they arrived in Mississippi in January 1964, along with Dick Jewett, another New York CORE member, they became the first full-time white civil rights workers in Mississippi.¹⁸

¹⁶ "What is COFO?" Social Action vertical folder, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁷ "Prospectus for the Summer." Social Action vertical folder. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁸ Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid, The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 260.

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After meeting with COFO leaders Bob Moses and Dave Dennis, the Schwerners went to Meridian to take over the programs begun by Matt Saurez and to organize the community center. They arrived in Meridian on January 21, 1964 and by the end of February the community center opened. It had a library with 10,000 volumes and a game room, and Mickey Schwerner began teaching voter education classes. Along with James Chaney, who usually drove, he began meeting with black leaders in Newton, Kemper and Clarke counties. Chaney, one of Suarez's first volunteers, became a paid CORE staff member in April 1964.

White Resistance

By the 1960s, Mississippi had a long tradition of enforcing racial segregation through legal and extralegal means. Whether based on statutory prescriptions, social mores, economics or a philosophy of racial supremacy and inferiority, the caste system permeated almost all aspects of life. The pervasive segregation was supported by the law, matters of racial etiquette and, ultimately, racial terrorism. Historian Neil R. McMillen wrote,

If the tenor of everyday race relations was generally even, the threat of physical aggression was nevertheless ever present. When violence shattered the racial calm, some whites deplored it and many attributed its "excesses" to ungovernable redneck passions. But white Mississippians of every class seemed to regard coercive acts against erring black individuals as object lessons of universal benefit to the subordinate race. A judicious flogging here-and, in extreme circumstances, an isolated lynching there-allayed white anxieties by reaffirming the color line and striking fear into black hearts.¹⁹

As the Civil Rights Movement progressed after World War II, white resistance in Mississippi became more focused and organized. The United States Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 striking down the concept of separate-but-equal schools, a bedrock foundation of racial segregation, marked a change in the tactics of white supremacists, "plunging Mississippi into a period of violent interracial conflict unmatched since the bloody years of the 1870s."²⁰

The Citizen's Council, an organization formed by white business leaders in the summer of 1954 and dedicated to maintaining segregated schools in the Delta, grew to over 25,000 dues-paying members, including members of the state legislature and local officials.²¹ Citizen's Council members controlled the jobs, leases, and loans for thousands of African Americans and punished activities such as NAACP membership or attempts to register to vote by economic intimidation.

The Mississippi Legislature created the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission in 1956, whose purpose was "to prevent encroachment upon the rights of this or other states by the Federal

¹⁹ Neil R. McMillen. *Dark Journey, Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 29.

²⁰ Dittmer, 34.

²¹ Dittmer, 45-46.

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Government.”²² It became in effect a secret police force engaged in surveillance, wiretapping and espionage on Mississippi citizens, gathering files on 10,000 people. The Sovereignty Commission conducted surveillance in the Longdale community as early as 1957, based on rumors of secret NAACP meetings.²³

The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan also contributed to the growth of violence against African Americans. The Klan had not been active in Mississippi since the 1930s. However, beginning in 1963, Klansmen burned crosses across the state. They were involved in firebombings, shootings, beatings and murder. The White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan became the most prominent and most violent Klan group in Mississippi. At a meeting in Brookhaven in February 1964, the organization adopted a forty page constitution with a plan of four stages, called “projects.” Culminating in Project 4 labelled “Extermination.” Sam Bowers, the Imperial Wizard, identified the White Knight’s mission as the destruction of the Mississippi civil rights movement.²⁴

Meridian, where Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney were busy organizing COFO programs, was the county seat of Lauderdale County, and also the home a flourishing klavern. Edgar Ray Killen, a lifelong resident of Neshoba County, held the office of “kleagle,” or recruiter for the White Knights and planned to extend the Klan activities into Neshoba County. Mickey Schwerner soon became an object of Klan attention. Everything about Schwerner fueled the Klan’s hatred. He was from New York, he was Jewish, and he and his wife associated with African Americans. Even Schwerner’s facial hair, which earned him the Klan sobriquet “Goatee,” offended them. Meridian Klansman hatched a plan to kill Schwerner. In May, Imperial Wizard Bowers told several members that “Goatee” was a “thorn in the side of everyone living, especially white people” and that he “should be taken care of.”²⁵

Freedom Summer and Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Although likely aware of the Klan threats, Schwerner and Chaney regularly travelled to Neshoba County, searching for sites for a Freedom School. During April and May, they met with several members of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in their homes to discuss the church’s role in Freedom Summer. With its rural location and its connection to a network of other African American churches in the area, it seemed an ideal candidate. The congregation invited Schwerner and Dave Dennis to address them in the church on May 31, 1964. Although there were some opposed, the majority of the congregation approved the project.

The COFO workers’ visits to Longdale and Mt. Zion Church did not escape the notice of the local Klan. The State Sovereignty Commission sent local sheriffs and police chiefs a description of Schwerner, the COFO vehicle, and its license tag.²⁶ On the evening of June 16, 1964, Mt.

²² Dittmer, 60.

²³ George, 109.

²⁴ Dittmer, 217.

²⁵ Cagin and Dray, 266.

²⁶ Dittmer, 251.

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Zion's lay leaders held a routine meeting. Coincidentally, that same night, the Lauderdale Klan and Neshoba Klan were meeting in the old Blomo school. Former Neshoba County Sheriff "Hop" Bennett reported to the assembled Klan members that he had noticed "heavily guarded" activity at the Mt. Zion church.²⁷ Klan members, probably hoping to find the COFO workers, set up road blocks on either side on Mt. Zion.

Cornelius Steele, leaving the church meeting, was stopped by armed men and asked where the "white boys" were. After hearing a gunshot, the men allowed Steele to leave unharmed. However, Bud and Beatrice Cole, who left the church going the other way, were not so fortunate. Armed men ordered Bud Cole out of his car, asking about "the guards." The men then beat Cole resulting in a broken jaw. Beatrice Cole believed one of the men was a police officer. The men also beat Georgia Rush, another church member, who suffered a broken collarbone.²⁸

After the attack at Mt. Zion, the Klan members returned to Blomo. The Lauderdale Klan members, responsible for beating Cole and Rush, challenged the Neshoba Klan members, who had allowed Steele to leave unharmed. According to one account, "the Neshobans' vanity had been wounded...After the meeting broke up, several of the men went drinking, then drove back up Highway 16 to the Longdale road and set fire to the Mt. Zion church."²⁹ No one was ever charged with burning the church.³⁰ Edgar Ray Killen later boasted that the church was burned to lure Mickey Schwerner back to Lauderdale County.³¹

Members of the Mt. Zion community learned the church was burned the next morning. Beatrice Cole had notice light coming from the vicinity of the church in the early morning hours of June 17 and was concerned the church was being burned. Dora Cottenhead, Beatrice's mother, visited the church that morning finding it completely destroyed with only the bricks and stones from the foundation and the tin from the roof remaining.³²

Mississippi Burning

When the Mt. Zion Church was burned, Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney were in Ohio where orientation for Freedom Summer volunteers was being conducted. However, when Schwerner returned to Mississippi, he and James Chaney went to Neshoba County on June 21, 1964, to interview witnesses and visit the site of the burned church. Andrew Goodman, a new Freedom Summer volunteer from New York, accompanied the men. They met with Cornelius Steele, Georgia Rush and the Coles and visited the ruins of the church. As the three COFO workers planned to return to Meridian, they made a fatal error. Rather than travelling the back roads, they chose to return on the state highway that ran through Philadelphia.

²⁷ George, 131.

²⁸ Mars, 169-170, 173.

²⁹ Cagin and Dray, 39.

³⁰ George, 132.

³¹ Cagin and Dray, 39.

³² Mars, 171-172.

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Chaney was driving, and as the car entered Philadelphia, Deputy Cecil Price stopped them for speeding. Assisted by two state troopers, Price took all three men into custody and transferred them to the Neshoba County jail. While the COFO workers were in jail, Price sent word to Edgar Ray Killen that he had found Goatee. The Klansmen agreed that Price would hold Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman in the county jail until dark when he would release them. Killen arranged for his co-conspirators to intercept the COFO men on their way to Meridian.³³

According to plan, Price released the men. He and another officer followed their car as it left Philadelphia on Highway 19. Price would later insist to investigators that that was the last time he saw the three men. However, Price was soon pursuing the COFO station wagon as it neared the Lauderdale County line on Highway 19, accompanied by two other cars filled with Klansmen. As Price's car closed on them, Chaney initially accelerated, but then for reasons still unknown, Chaney brought the car to a stop.³⁴

Price ordered the three men into the rear seat of his police car. When Chaney was perceived to hesitate, Price struck him in the head with a blackjack. Then the three cars, Price's police car, a second Klan car, and the COFO station wagon driven by one of the Klansmen, convoyed to Rock Cut Road, an area described as "dark, quiet and obscure."³⁵

Wayne Roberts pulled Mickey Schwerner from the car. He then shot him in the chest. Roberts returned to the car and pulled Andrew Goodman to his feet, then shot him in the chest. James Jordan then shot James Chaney in the abdomen. Roberts fired at the same time, striking Chaney in the back and as Chaney lay in the gully, he fired a shot into his head.³⁶

The Klansmen placed the bodies in the rear of the station wagon. They drove to a farm locally known as the Old Jolley Place where a cattle pond with an earthen dam was under construction. Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman were buried at the base of the dam under mounds of red-streaked gray clay.³⁷

44 Days

When Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman had not returned to Meridian, at about 4:00pm, COFO workers contacted the state office in Jackson to report the delay. They were told to wait another hour to begin emergency procedures. Local and state workers began calling jails and hospitals to see if the men were there. Although COFO telephone records show a call to the Neshoba County jail, the jailors later denied speaking to anyone from COFO. Unable to locate the men, COFO

³³ Cagin and Dray, 10-12; 279.

³⁴ Cagin and Dray, 287; 289-290.

³⁵ Cagin and Dray, 292-293.

³⁶ Cagin and Dray, 294-295.

³⁷ Cagin and Dray, 299.

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volunteers contacted FBI agents and attorneys at the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department.³⁸

Repeat calls to the county jails the following morning finally reached the wife of the Neshoba County jailor, who told the COFO volunteer that the three men had been in the jail, paid a \$20.00 fine and had been released about 6:00pm the previous day. Continued calls to the Justice Department finally paid off when the New Orleans office of the FBI sent agents to assist the search for the missing civil rights workers.³⁹

Philadelphia's white community did not respond well to the increased federal scrutiny, or the droves of national reporters who came to the town. A prevailing attitude in the community was that the entire episode, beginning with the burning of Mt. Zion Church up to the disappearance of the three COFO workers, was a hoax, perpetrated by outside agitators.⁴⁰ Joseph Lelyveld a reporter for the *New York Times Magazine* related an incident where a crowd of residents threatened him and a photographer.⁴¹

On June 22, based on a tip from the Choctaw Reservation superintendent, FBI agents found the COFO car in a wooded area in Bogue Chitto. The car was completely burned down to the metal frame. By June 25, the FBI was joined by three busloads of sailors who searched the swamps and wooded areas of Neshoba County. FBI searchers began dragging operations in the Pearl River. When all of these searches failed to produce any evidence related to the three missing men the FBI redirected their efforts. One FBI agent later said, "as we exhausted that type of thing...I became satisfied that we would ultimately solve this case by conducting an investigation rather than a search. The target was the Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan."⁴²

The FBI found few citizens in Neshoba County willing to assist their investigation, and members of the Klan maintained their silence. Perhaps the biggest break in the case came at the end of July. An unnamed informant identified the site where the bodies of the three men were buried. On August 1, FBI agents began a meticulous excavation and found the remains of all three missing men.⁴³

Conspiracy Trial

The discovery of the bodies shook the confidence of the White Knights, and the wall of silence broke down. The FBI began to develop informants with knowledge of Klan activities. More importantly, James Jordan, a participant in the murder of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman,

³⁸ Cagin and Dray, 42-44.

³⁹ Cagin and Dray, 318-319; 325.

⁴⁰ Mars, 87-88.

⁴¹ Joseph Lelyveld. "A Stranger in Philadelphia, Mississippi." *New York Times Magazine*, December 27, 1964. P. 36.

⁴² Cagin and Dray, 338; 362; 364-365.

⁴³ Cagin and Dray, 394-400.

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confessed and provided details of the events of June 21, but denied being present when the men were killed.⁴⁴

Although the FBI investigation proceeded, Justice Department officials still had to find a way to charge the Klan members. Murder was not a federal offense at the time. Justice Department lawyers relied on a Reconstruction-era law, the Civil Rights Act of 1870, which provided for the prosecution of persons who deprived others of their civil rights.⁴⁵

In January 1965, a federal grand jury in Jackson indicted the Neshoba County conspirators. Federal Judge Harold Cox dismissed the charges, but the United States Supreme Court reinstated the charges in March 1966. A new grand jury in 1967 reindicted the conspirators, including Neshoba County Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, Deputy Cecil Price, Klan Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers and thirteen others.⁴⁶

Then trial began on October 7, 1967, in U.S. District Court in Meridian, Mississippi. The jury returned guilty verdicts against Cecil Price, Sam Bowers and five other. They returned not guilty verdicts against Sheriff Rainey and seven others. The jury could not reach a verdict for three defendants, including Edgar Ray Killen. Authors Seth Cagin and Philip Dray noted

The October 20, 1967, conviction of Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price and six of his codefendants marked the first successful jury convictions of white officials and Klansmen in the history of Mississippi for crimes against black people or civil rights workers.⁴⁷

Justice Delayed

Although the trial found some of the Klansmen guilty, Edgar Ray Killen remained free. Beginning in the 1990s, Mississippi prosecutors brought charges against several prominent defendants for crimes committed during the civil rights era. A jury convicted Byron de la Beckwith for the assassination of Medgar Evers in 1964. Sam Bowers was convicted for his involvement in the murder of Vernon Dahmer in 1966. A Humphreys County jury found three men guilty of the 1959 murder of Rainey Pool, while a federal jury convicted Ernest Avants of the 1966 murder of Ben Chester White.⁴⁸ In 1999, Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore reopened the case against Killen for the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman. A Neshoba County grand jury indicted Killen for the three murders in June 2005, and he went to trial in Philadelphia in July. The jury found Killen guilty of three counts of manslaughter, and the judge sentenced him to three twenty year terms, to be served consecutively.⁴⁹ Killen remains in prison in 2017.

⁴⁴ Cagin and Dray, 428-433.

⁴⁵ Cagin and Dray, 434.

⁴⁶ Cagin and Dray, 441-443.

⁴⁷ Cagin and Dray, 451.

⁴⁸ Howard Ball. *Justice in Mississippi, The Trial of Edgar Ray Killen*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), p. 56.

⁴⁹ Ball, 176-177.

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Mt. Zion Methodist Church Rebuilt

After Mt. Zion Methodist Church was burned on June 16, 1964, the community resolved to rebuild. The congregation received financial support from the Central Jurisdictional Methodist Conference, the body that governed black Methodist churches in Mississippi, which provided an \$8000 loan. Members raised \$1600.⁵⁰ The Committee of Concern, a biracial group of interdenominational religious leaders, gave \$5000. The Committee of Concern was organized by Dr. William Davis, secretary of the Mississippi Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in September 1964. Davis met with members of St. Matthew Baptist Church in Rankin County after their church was burned in August 1964 and was inspired by the congregation's intent to rebuild.⁵¹ The Committee of Concern, composed of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, both black and white, raised nearly \$130,000 over 28 months and provided assistance to 42 churches in Mississippi.⁵²

The white First Methodist Church in Philadelphia organized a fund-raising effort. However, the Mt. Zion church declined the donation when the gift was made contingent on the agreement that the building would never be used for anything other than church activities. Cornelius Steele, the chairman of the Mt. Zion fundraising committee told Florence Mars that the congregation was not interested in surrendering control of the church in return for white support.⁵³ Work began on the new church in the summer of 1965, culminating in a February 1966 dedication. Even this victory over the Klan was marred when Joe Lyon, the president of the local NAACP and the contractor for the new church, had a cross burned on his lawn.⁵⁴

On June 21 1965, the first anniversary of the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, a memorial service was held on the grounds of Mt. Zion. Following the murders, COFO had established an office in Philadelphia, and about 75 people, mostly local Neshoba County blacks, marched from the COFO office to Mt. Zion. Florence Mars noted this was the first time blacks had ever marched in Neshoba County.⁵⁵ This began an annual tradition that continues to this day.

Historic Significance of Mt. Zion Methodist Church

The Mt. Zion Methodist Church in rural Neshoba County, Mississippi, built in 1899, burned in 1964, and rebuilt in 1966 was at the epicenter of an arc of events in the spring and summer of

⁵⁰ Mars, 176, 178.

⁵¹ James Silver. *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.: 1966), 286-287.

⁵² Oren Renick. "'The Great Adventure,' A Comprehensive Study of Mississippi Baptist Work With The Negro Through the Committee of Concern and the Department of Work With Negroes." (M.A. thesis, Mississippi College, 1967) 112.

⁵³ Mars, 180.

⁵⁴ Mars, 280.

⁵⁵ Mars, 183.

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1964 that drew international attention to Mississippi. But its story also encompasses the great period of rebuilding that occurred in African American churches during and after the Civil Rights period. As such, the church stands today not only as a symbol of the struggle of African Americans to achieve civil rights, defined by the National Park Service's National Historic Landmark Program as the "greatest mass movement in modern American history,"⁵⁶ but also of these congregations' resiliency and dedication to place as they made a tangible statement that they would not be moved from their land. The church represents the hopes and aspirations of freed people in the years following the Civil War, their experience in the Jim Crow era, the methods and tactics employed by civil rights organizers, the depth of white resistance to legal equality for African Americans, and the determination to rebuild in defiance of racial violence.

As the modern civil rights movement evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, the eyes of the nation were drawn to local events across the country including the Freedom Riders in Anniston, Alabama, a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. So it was in the summer of 1964 when battalions of college students traveled to Mississippi to work with local organizers on voter registration and education programs. Journalist Bruce Watson wrote of Freedom Summer,

Before it was over, all of America would focus on Mississippi, TV and newspapers would tar and feather the state. Hundreds of doctors, lawyers, and clergymen would come to help student volunteers. Folksingers, Hollywood stars, and Martin Luther King himself would flock to Mississippi, where whiplash violence was shredding the social contract. Thirty-five churches would be torched, five dozen houses and Freedom houses would be bombed, and Mississippi would become synonymous with murder.⁵⁷

When Mt. Zion Methodist Church members were attacked and the church burned, the local media paid little attention. However, the newspaper in New Orleans reported the story. When Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman disappeared on June 21, the *New York Times* carried the story on page one.⁵⁸ As the FBI searched for the three men, President Lyndon Johnson met with Andrew Goodman's parents and Mickey Schwerner's father in the White House. Walter Cronkite, in a one-hour CBS News broadcast, reported that the whole country was watching Mississippi. NBC News broadcast a two-hour special report on the search for the men. On July 24, accompanied by the national press corps, Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Philadelphia and the ruins of Mt. Zion Methodist Church, where he told members of the congregation, "I feel sorry for those who were hurt by this, [but] I rejoice that there are churches relevant enough that

⁵⁶ National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*, National Park Service, 2002, rev 2008, p. 17

⁵⁷ Bruce Watson. *Freedom Summer, The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 13.

⁵⁸ Taylor Branch. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 365.

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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people of ill will will be willing to burn them.”⁵⁹ As the search for the three men continued, the media attention waned. But when the bodies of the three men were found on August 4, the national media returned to Neshoba County.

During Freedom Summer, COFO organized the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party and planned to challenge the seating of the regular Mississippi Democratic delegation at the national party convention in Atlantic City. Although the challenge was rejected, national attention was once again focused on Mississippi when Fannie Lou Hamer testified before the party’s Credential Committee, where she invoked the memory of the assassination of Medgar Evers, James Meredith’s battle to enroll at the University of Mississippi, and the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman.⁶⁰ The MDFP arrived in Atlantic City towing a replica of the COFO worker’s burnt-out car.⁶¹

Almost every history of the modern civil rights movement includes an account of the murders. Documentary filmmakers have produced numerous films about the events of the summer of 1964 in Neshoba County. These include an episode of the Peabody Award-winning documentary *Eyes on the Prize, America’s Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985*, originally broadcast on the Public Broadcasting System’s series *American Experience*. Filmmakers Micki Dickoff and Tony Pagano produced *Neshoba: The Price of Freedom* in 2010, which *New York Times* film critic A. O. Scott reported “focusses on one of the most notorious and terrible incidents of the 1960s and its long aftermath.”⁶² Even Hollywood has addressed the incident in the fictionalized 1988 movie *Mississippi Burning*.

Less dramatic, but as important, is the active agency the congregation took in rebuilding their church on its historic location, and in doing so, tangibly demonstrating the determined continuity of rural African American communities. When the Mt. Zion congregation rebuilt their church in 1966, they testified to the world that violence, arson, and even murder, would not deter the quest for equality or undermine their rights to their land.

Comparables

The church remains the best physical site to memorialize the events of the summer of 1964. The Community Development Partnership, a coalition of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the Industrial Development Authority of Neshoba County, the Tourism Council, and the Philadelphia Main Street Association, produced the Neshoba County African-American Driving Tour and a pamphlet titled *Roots of Struggle, Rewards of Sacrifice*. The map directs visitors to the places associated with the murder of the three civil rights workers. These include the

⁵⁹ Cagin and Dray, 381.

⁶⁰ Juan William. *Eyes on the Prize, America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987), 241.

⁶¹ Branch, 457.

⁶² A. O. Scott. “A Long Hot Summer in Mississippi That Still Burns.” *New York Times*, August 10, 2010.

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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Neshoba County jail, where Cecil Price held the men while the Klan organized their attack; Rock Cut Road where a marker memorializes the site where the Klansmen executed their victims; the Bogue Chitto Swamp, where authorities discovered the burnt-out car ; and the Earthen Dam where the Klan buried the men. The tour map also leads visitors to the Mt. Zion Methodist Church which includes memorials Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman. The Rock Cut Road and the Bogue Chitto Swamp remain largely as they were in 1964, with little to remind a visitor of the events that occurred there. The Earthen Dam is on private property with No Trespassing signs posted. The Neshoba County Jail has been altered over time, and in 2007, the National Park Service removed the building from further study for landmark designation, but the jail is a contributing resource in the Downtown Philadelphia Historic District.⁶³ The Downtown Philadelphia Historic District was listed on the National Register in April 2005 with national significance for its part in the events of 1964 and as the site of two marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964 and 1966.⁶⁴

The modern national civil rights movement was marked by violent reactions from the beginning, committed by private citizens and law enforcement. Organizers, protestors, marchers, and school children were beaten, threatened with police dogs, pelted with tear gas and doused with firehoses. Opponents firebombed churches, homes and schools. The most extreme actors perpetrated murder and assassinations. The end papers of Juan William's book, *Eyes on the Prize, America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1968*, include timelines of events, including one titled "Violence." The first event is the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Till's murderers were brought to trial but exonerated by a jury. The trial occurred in the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi. The courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for national significance.⁶⁵ Medgar Evers, the Mississippi Field Secretary for the NAACP, was assassinated in the driveway of his Jackson home in 1963. The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a designated National Historic Landmark. When James Meredith enrolled at the University of Mississippi in 1962, white opponents to integration rioted, resulting in two deaths. The site of the riot is included in the National Historic Landmark Lyceum-The Circle Historic District⁶⁶ in Oxford, Mississippi. In September 1963, Klansmen bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four young girls. The Department of the Interior designated the church as a National Historic Landmark in 2006.⁶⁷ After Jimmie Lee Jackson, a voting rights organizer, was shot and killed by police officer in Selma, Alabama in 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC organized a march from Selma to the Alabama

⁶³ National Historic Landmark Theme Study. "Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights." National Park Service. 2007, revised 2009. P. 127

⁶⁴ National Register of Historic Places. Downtown Philadelphia Historic District, Philadelphia, Neshoba County, MS #05000280

⁶⁵ National Register of Historic Places. Tallahatchie County Courthouse (Second District), Sumner, Tallahatchie County, MS #07000149

⁶⁶ National Historic Landmark. The Lyceum-The Circle Historic District, Oxford, Lafayette County, MS. #08001092

⁶⁷ National Historic Landmark. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Jefferson County. # 8000696

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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State Capitol in Montgomery. As the marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama state troopers assaulted the marchers with clubs, whips and tear gas. The event, known as Bloody Sunday, was broadcast on national television. The Edmund Pettus Bridge⁶⁸ and the Brown Chapel AME Church⁶⁹ in Selma, where the marchers began, are both National Historic Landmarks.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

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- Branch, Taylor. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
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- Dittmer, John. *Local People, The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- George, Carol V. R. *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi: Methodists, Murder and Racial Justice in Neshoba County*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Johnson, Inez Calloway. "History of Longdale High School, 1949-1963." Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.
- Lelyveld, Joseph. "A Stranger in Philadelphia, Mississippi." *New York Times magazine*, December 27, 1964.
- Mars, Florence. *Witness in Philadelphia*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1977.

⁶⁸ National Historic Landmark. Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Dallas County, AL # 13000281

⁶⁹ National Historic Landmark. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, Selma, Dallas County, AL.# 82002009

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

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McMillen, Neil R. *Dark Journey, Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

National Historic Landmark. The Lyceum-The Circle Historic District, Oxford, Lafayette County, MS. #08001092

National Historic Landmark. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL. # 8000696

National Historic Landmark. Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Dallas County, AL # 13000281

National Historic Landmark. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, Selma, Dallas County, AL. # 82002009

National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites.* National Park Service, 2002, revised 2008.

National Historic Landmark Theme Study. *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights.* National Park Service, 2007, rev. 2009.

National Register of Historic Places. Downtown Philadelphia Historic District, Philadelphia, Neshoba County, MS #05000280

National Register of Historic Places. Tallahatchie County Courthouse (Second District), Sumner, Tallahatchie County, MS #07000149

"Prospectus for the Summer." Social Action folder. Freedom Summer Collection. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Renick, Oren. "'The Great Adventure,' A Comprehensive Study of Mississippi Baptist Work With the Negro Through the Committee of Concern and the Department of Work With Negroes." M. A. Thesis, Mississippi College, 1967.

Silver, James. *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966.

Watson, Bruce. *Freedom Summer, The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy*. New York: Penguin Press, 2010.

"What is COFO?" Social Action vertical folder. Freedom Summer Collection. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

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Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize, America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. New York, Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987.

Yates, Jennelle B. and Theresa T. Rideout, eds. *Red Clay Hills of Neshoba, Roots, Reflections-Ramblings, The Early History of Neshoba County*. Philadelphia, MS: The Neshoba County Historic Society, 1992.

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): 099-PHI-5103.1 _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx 6 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 32.781389 Longitude: -89.991389

See Continuation Sheet

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- 1. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 2. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 3. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Mt. Zion Methodist Church occupies Neshoba County Parcel 06700-20-017.000. It is approximately 5.6 acres, described as the Southwest 1/4 of the Southwest 1/4 of the Southeast 1/4 and East 1/2 of the Southeast 1/4 of the Southwest 1/4 of Section 20, Township 11, Range 13.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the rural parcel historically associated with Mt. Zion Methodist Church.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Rachel Krawitz, Director _____
 organization: Historic Preservation Graduate Program, Delaware State University _____
 street & number: 1200 N. du Pont Avenue _____
 city or town: Dover _____ state: Delaware ___ zip code: 19901 _____
 e-mail rkrawitz@desu.edu _____
 telephone: 302-857-7139 _____
 date: 12-29-2016 _____

name/title: Bill Gatlin, Architectural Historian _____
 organization: Mississippi Department of Archives and History _____
 street & number: 100 S. State St _____
 city or town: Jackson _____ state: MS ___ zip code: 39206 _____
 e-mail bgatlin@mdah.ms.gov _____

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

telephone: 601-576-6951

date: 12-29-2016

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.)

Returned

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Neshoba County, Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Mt. Zion Methodist Church

City or Vicinity: Philadelphia

County: Neshoba State: Mississippi

Photographer: Jennifer Baughn, MDAH Chief Architectural Historian

Date Photographed: October 25, 2016

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

- 1 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing North.
- 2 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Southwest.
- 3 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Northeast.
- 4 of 14. Exterior. Camera facing Southeast.
- 5 of 14. Sanctuary. Camera facing East.
- 6 of 14. Sanctuary window. Camera facing East.
- 7 of 14. Sanctuary. Camera facing West
- 8 of 14. Pastor's Study. Camera facing Northeast.
- 9 of 14. Office. Camera facing Southeast.
- 10 of 14. Fellowship Hall. Camera facing East.
- 11 of 14. Fellowship Hall. Camera facing West.
- 12 of 14. Cemetery. Camera facing North.
- 13 of 14. Church Bell. Camera facing North.
- 14 of 14. Masonic Lodge. Camera facing South.

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mt. Zion Methodist Church
Name of Property
Neshoba County, Mississippi
County and State
NA
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 10 Page 1



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Mt. Zion Methodist Church

Name of Property

Neshoba County, Mississippi

County and State

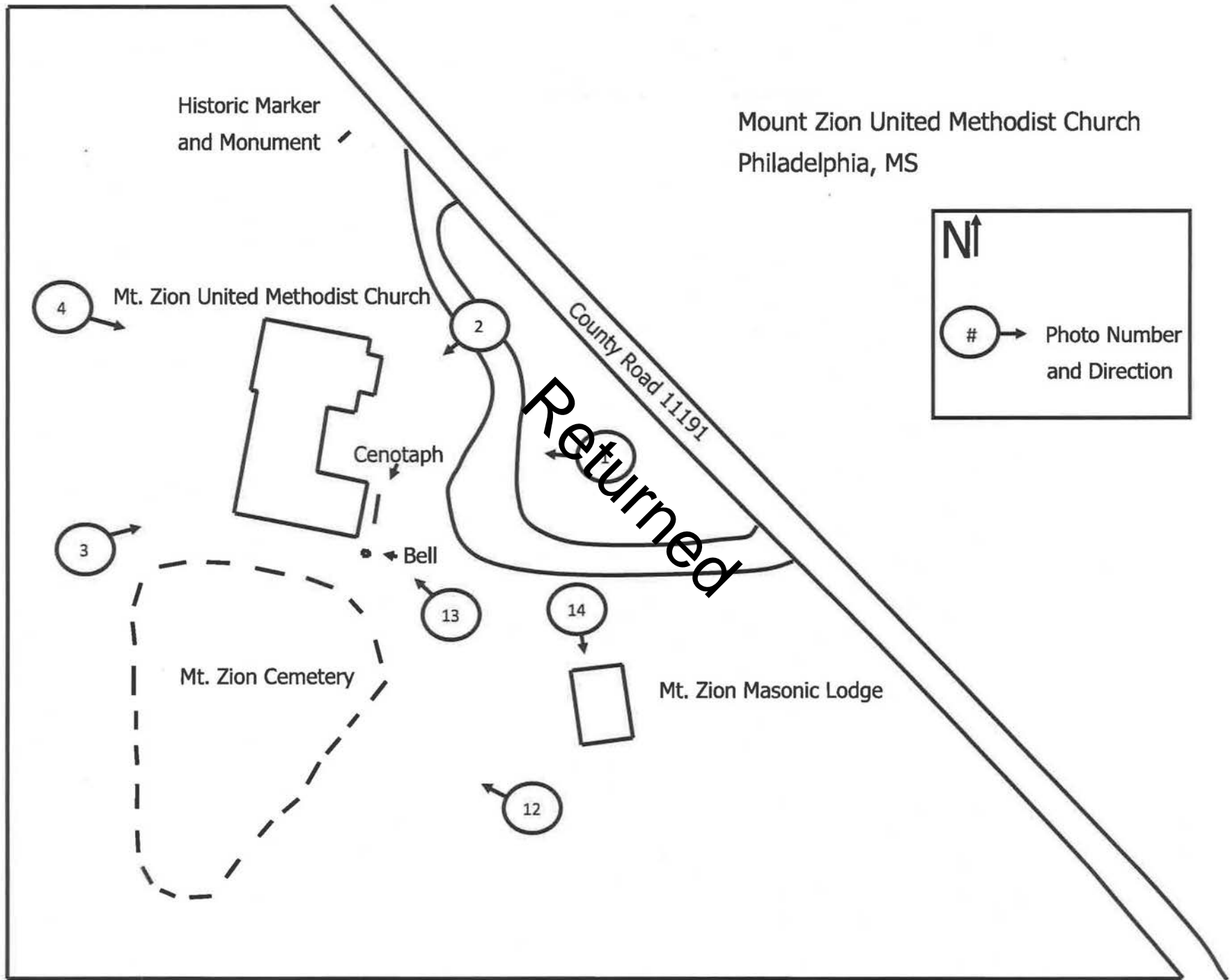
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

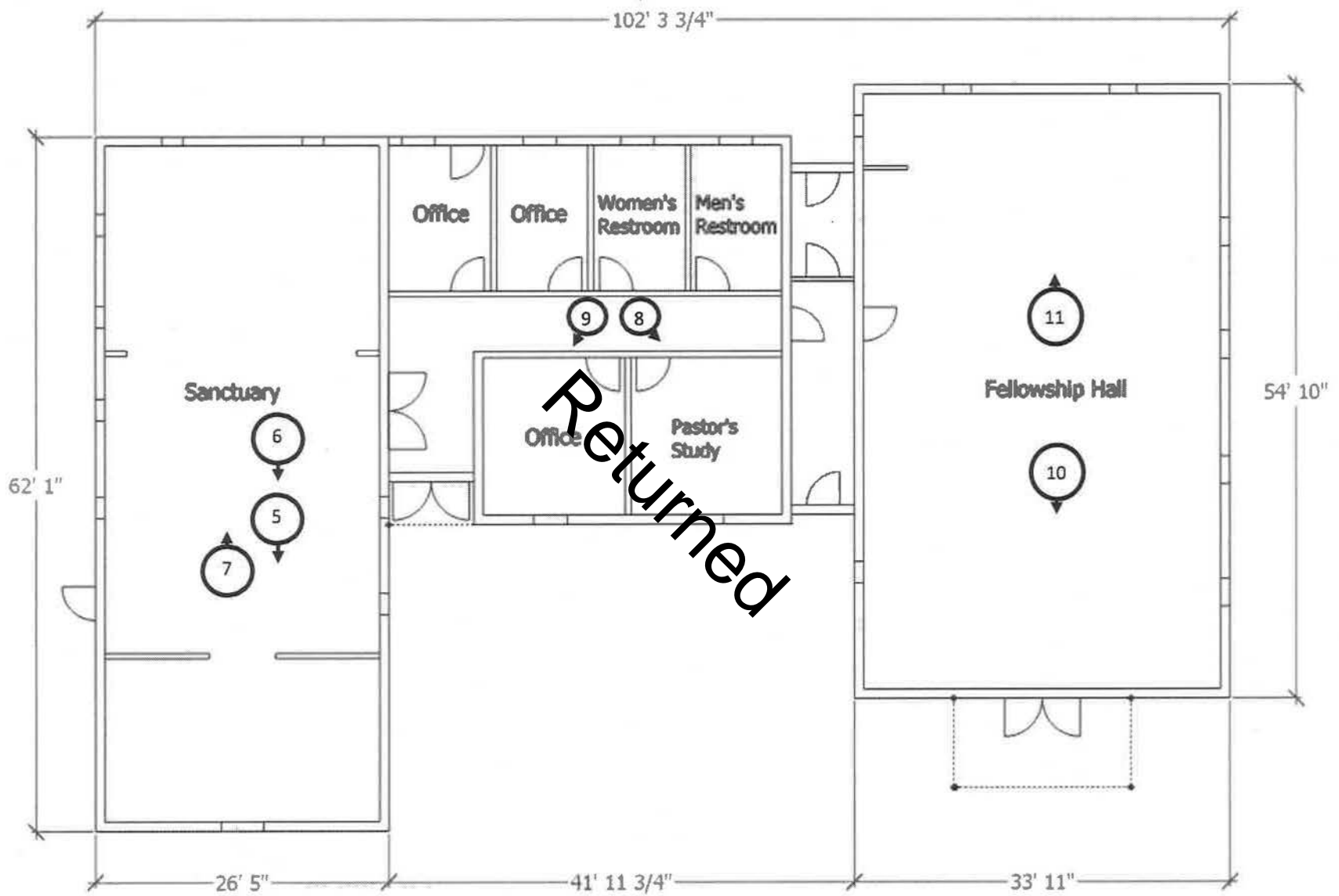
Section number Historic Photograph

Page 1



Historic Photograph of Church Ruins, Associated Press, June 17, 1964

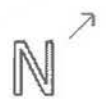




Returned

Mt. Zion United Methodist Church
 11191 Road 747
 Philadelphia vic., Neshoba Co. MS

Photo Number and Direction ← (#)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 4/21/2017 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: Date of 45th Day: 6/5/2017 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

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 checked="" 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 5/31/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Jim Gabbert  Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date 5-28-2017

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.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

The United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Evaluation/Return Sheet

Property Name: Mt. Zion Methodist Church, Neshoba County, MS

Reference Number: 100001007

Reason for Return

Mt. Zion Methodist Church appears to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination is being returned because the documentation does not justify the national level of significance for the property.

We believe that the property, as it is today, with the 1966/1971 church building, the cemetery, the fellowship hall, the commemorative marker, and the recently-moved in Masonic hall is eligible at the local and perhaps even state level for the congregation's response to the horrific act of arson and murder that took place on the site. As Ken P'Pool noted in his email of May 26, 2017, the church members, "acting under their own agency as a voice of defiance" constructed the present-day building on the site of the destroyed church. We feel that this action, the result of which is evidenced by the current appearance and use of the site, sufficiently supports significance under Criterion A at a lower-than-national threshold. The story of the Freedom School, the Klan's act of arson, and the eventual rebuilding is an inspiring story and is worthy of recognition in the National Register. Had the three civil rights workers not visited, or had they not been killed afterward, the story would still be compelling and the church would still be eligible, but not as a nationally significant event.

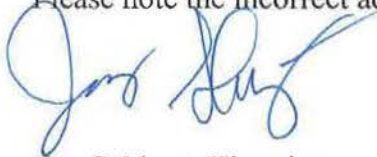
The disappearance/murder of the three civil rights workers captured the nation's attention. The resultant scrutiny of events in Mississippi and the south in general, the failure of local or state law enforcement to charge anyone in the murders, and the increased Federal involvement (including prosecutions for violations of victim's civil rights) helped push forward passage of the Voting Rights Act. The murders of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman are the core of a nationally significant chain of events that occurred at specific locations, none

of which can stand on its own to tell this nationally-significant story. If your desire is to see the Mt. Zion Methodist Church listed at the national level of significance, we suggest that you might consider nominating a discontinuous district that includes the touchstone sites associated with the death of the COFO workers; such a district might include the church, the police station, the sites of the murders and burial, and perhaps the courthouse where some of the perpetrators were convicted. This hypothetical district would then serve to tell the whole story of the nationally significant event.

Nominating the Mt. Zion Methodist Church at a lower than national level of significance does not diminish the importance of the property. It does not slight the courage and fortitude of the congregation in the face of dangerous adversity. A nomination of the property that tells the story of the property within the context of racial strife in Mississippi and the hurdles the congregation overcame as it took on the de jure and de facto repression of civil rights stands alone, independent of the murders, and is reflected in the property's current appearance. But the property as it exists today is not independently national significant as it relates to the national story centered on the murders. On its own, the property lacks integrity from the time of the COFO workers' visit. Significance is not transferable; the buildings there today did not bear witness to the visit of the civil rights workers on that fateful day in 1964.

We look forward to the resubmission of the property, either as a stand-alone nomination focused on the activities and resilience of the church members in reaction to the struggle for equal rights in Mississippi, or as part of a nomination that encompasses the various sites related to the murders of the COFO workers and the eventual trial and conviction of some of the perpetrators, which taken as a whole, *is* a nationally significant event.

Please note the incorrect address in Section 1 (County Road 747) and on the site map.



Jim Gabbert, Historian
National Register of Historic Places
6/2/2017



HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION
P. O. BOX 571
Jackson, MS 39205-0571
Phone 601-576-6940 Fax 601-576-6955
Website: mdah.ms.gov

May 24, 2018

Mr. Jim Gabbert
1849 C. Street, NW
Washington, DC 202040

RECEIVED 228

MAY 30 2018

NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Re: Mt. Zion Methodist Church, Neshoba County, MS

Dear Jim:

After receiving the National Register office's return of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church nomination last June, we intended to conduct more research and resubmit a revised nomination at the national level of significance. However, severe staffing shortages in the year since then have hampered our efforts to revisit this nomination until now. Our architectural historians, historians, and State Historic Preservation Officer, along with our state review board, are unanimous in their opinion that the church site is nationally significant and that it has a high level of integrity to the Civil Rights events that engulfed the site from 1964 to 1966.

The return states that "the buildings there today did not bear witness to the visit of the civil rights workers on that fateful day in 1964," and if the National Register only honored buildings, we would have to agree with that statement. But the National Register recognizes places, not just buildings, and in this broader definition, the site is indeed intact, as noted in the nomination, including the setting along a country road in a rural, still primarily African American neighborhood; the semi-circular gravel drive that leads up to the church's elevated site; and the cemetery that contains the grave markers of many of the church's members since the nineteenth century. This is the site that Mickey Schwerner and James Chaney visited on May 31, 1964 to discuss holding a Freedom School; this is the site where members of the Ku Klux Klan blocked both ends of the driveway and beat up church members who left their meeting "going to the left," while those going to the right were allowed to pass; where Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman visited the burned-out church; and where church members decided to build a new building roughly on the same footprint as the old. On top of this layer is the rebuilt church—still holding regular services—and commemorative markers, neither of which detracts from the integrity of the site as a whole. Taken together, the layers on this site form a powerful narrative that includes both the lives of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman and the lives and advocacy of the black community that Mt. Zion served and still serves.

The return also suggested that the church site might be better listed as part of a discontinuous district that would include the jail in Philadelphia, the road where the three civil rights workers were murdered, the dam where they were buried, and the county courthouse in Philadelphia.

As we noted in the Mt. Zion nomination, the jail and courthouse already form important components of the nationally significant Downtown Philadelphia Historic District, listed on the National Register in April 2005, so their part in the story is already recognized. The road site, which is approximate, has a historical marker; the dam site is on private property, and the owners have never been interested in pursuing National Register listing. Importantly, in contrast to those other sites where the Civil Rights workers were victims of events, the Mt. Zion church site represents both the agency of its African American members and of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman themselves, who were in the process of organizing Freedom Summer activities.

With this letter we ask the National Park Service to reconsider Mt. Zion Methodist Church as a site with several layers forming a nationally significant story of Freedom Summer, activism by local black Mississippians, massive resistance by local Klansmen, and the responses to the murders of the three CORE workers. If you believe we need to revise the existing text to emphasize the site and its integrity in order to more clearly explain the national significance, we are happy to do that with your guidance.

If however, you remain opposed to the idea of national significance for the Mt. Zion property, the church's leadership is willing to have the National Park Service revise the existing nomination's significance to the statewide level via a Supplementary Listing Record (SLR). With this, the property would at least be listed in the National Register and attain Federal recognition in keeping with the recognition it continues to receive from Civil Rights veterans and others who regularly visit the site either individually or on organized tours.

Please let us know if there are any questions.

Sincerely,



Kenneth H. P'Pool
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240



IN REPLY REFER TO:

H32(2280)

JUL 13 2018

Mr. Kenneth P'Pool
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Historic Preservation Division
P. O. Box 571
Jackson, MS 39205-0571

Dear Mr. P'Pool:

Thank you for your letter of May 24, 2018, requesting that the National Register reconsider the Mt. Zion Methodist Church nomination at the national level of significance. We re-reviewed the nomination, the Downtown Philadelphia Historic District nomination (Philadelphia, MS), and other sources related to the incident of June 21, 1964, and have reached a conclusion similar to that of our initial review—that is, that the Mt. Zion Method Church individually does not possess sufficient integrity to be listed at the national level of significance. Even looking at this property as a site—as opposed to as a building (which is the category of property identified in the documentation), the evaluation of integrity of the site as it relates to the significant event remains the same. While we appreciate the Mississippi Department of Archives and History's viewpoint, the introduction of subsequent elements onto the landscape – the new buildings and even the commemorative markers – does affect the integrity of setting.

The property is most definitely eligible for listing, and the nomination was signed July 13, 2018, adding it to the National Register. However, our assessment remains that it does not rise to the level of national significance in isolation. As a single listing, the property is eligible at a statewide level of significance—in accordance with the alternative proposed in the nominating authority's request for reconsideration.

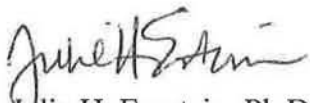
The purpose of this letter is two-fold. First, I would like to reiterate the suggestion made in the National Register reviewer's initial return comments, dated June 2, 2017, that a discontinuous district comprising not only the church but other associated sites (e.g., the Old Noshoba County Jail, the location of the murder on Cut Rock Road, and the burial site) is collectively representative of the nationally significant events of June 21, 1964. Taken as a whole, these disparate sites work together as a district to illustrate the tragic event that precipitated a national reaction.

We empathize with your expressed concerns about staff time and the ability to pursue a potential discontinuous district nomination. Your letter notes capacity concerns as well as the probability of owner objection to inclusion within a district by the owner of the burial site. In reflecting on these issues, it occurs to us that the research and preparation of this hypothetical discontinuous district might be an appropriate candidate for the African American Civil Rights Grants program. The associated application period for the next grant cycle is August 1 - October 1, 2018 (<https://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/civil-rights/>). Likewise, one should recall that if only one private property owner were to object to inclusion of their property in a proposed historic district that has two or more privately-owned properties, that objection constitutes less than 50%. Per the owner objection provisions of the National Register program, this does not present an insurmountable obstacle and would not defeat the creation of such a hypothetical district.

Still another avenue of recognition that you might wish to pursue is inclusion of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church in the program established by the African American Civil Rights Network Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-104; 54 U.S.C. 308401). The newly-formed U.S. Civil Rights Network is a NPS program that is administered by Dr. Turkiya L. Lowe, Chief of the Park History Program here at the Washington Support Office (WASO) of the National Park Service (tel.: 202.354.2214; email: turkiya_lowe@nps.gov).

The National Park Service values its partnership with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and it is our sincere hope that the results of this reconsideration and associated recommendations will be helpful to your staff in its decision making process. Please let me know if we can be of any assistance in either addressing any questions you may have regarding this reconsideration or if we may be of assistance in facilitating an introduction or conference call with staff of either of the two other NPS programs mentioned in this letter.

Sincerely,



Julie H. Ernstein, Ph.D., RPA
Acting Chief, National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program
Deputy Keeper of the National Register