

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JAN 16 1976

DATE ENTERED JUN 3 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC *wh*
Mount Bethel Baptist Meeting House
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER *about 2 mi N of Mountainville off US 78*
Mount Bethel Road & Mountainview Road
CITY, TOWN *Martinville vic.* WARREN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Warren Township VICINITY OF *5th*
STATE *New Jersey* CODE *34* COUNTY *Somerset* CODE *035*

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mount Bethel Baptist Church
STREET & NUMBER Mount Bethel Road
CITY, TOWN Warren Township VICINITY OF STATE New Jersey

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Hall of Records
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN Somerville STATE New Jersey

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory (3209.1)
DATE c. 1960 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Historic Sites Office, Department of Environmental Protection
CITY, TOWN Trenton STATE New Jersey

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | DATE <u>ca. 1785</u> |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mount Bethel Baptist Meeting House is a plain 2 1/2 story height frame building, not unlike dwellings typically constructed in the region in the latter part of the 18th century. This style of construction was typical of Meetinghouses built during the colonial period, particularly in regions just being settled.

Constructed around 1761, the building was moved in 1785-86 to its present location, on a plateau in the 2nd Watchung Mountain Range. It was apparently moved to this site to provide easier access for the sparsely populated area.

Measuring 40 feet by 30 feet the Meetinghouse has two front entrances, both protected by small hooded porches. The doorways and framing appear 19th century. The windows are presently 2/2 replacements. One gable end facade has a circular air vent just below the roof peak.

The framing of the structure is massive hand-hewn beams with brick fill between the walls.

The interior of the church has a simple floor plan complementing the simplicity of the exterior. The pews face the long north wall, but originally faced the south wall where a small pulpit hung in the middle of the wall. In 1887 the church pews were turned to face a new pulpit on a small platform on the floor.

There are two galleries on the second story on the shorter walls, supported by simple round wooden columns.

The Meetinghouse has had few major alterations since its inception in 1761. Changes include the aforementioned geographic turnabout and repairs to the church in 1818 and 1835. In 1950 electricity was first installed in the building and the galleries were curtained off for Sunday School classes.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) culture |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | |

SPECIFIC DATES 1761, 1785

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mount Bethel Baptist Meetinghouse was Somerset County's first Baptist congregation and is one of the oldest extant Baptist churches in New Jersey.

Religion/Culture

Formed out of the Scotch Plains Baptist Church in 1767 it appears that the Mount Bethel Meeting House itself predates the congregation by several years, being constructed in 1761.

Genealogically associated with Scotch Plains and Piscataway, the early settlers of the Mount Bethel area (then Bernards Township) are clearly affiliated with New England culture and traditions.

The Mount Bethel Baptist Church is a concrete link to that culture.

The Meetinghouse was disassembled and relocated from the valley to its present location on a plateau of the Watchung Mountain in 1785-1786. Apparently the move was calculated to be a more convenient location for the parishioners. Gradually the congregation grew, being influenced in its growth by the numerous revivals of the era. In 1801 nine members were dismissed from Mount Bethel to form a church at Black River.

At that time the Mount Bethel Church had over two hundred members; its largest ever. The Millington Baptist Church, however, was formed in 1851 and relieved the overcrowding at Mount Bethel.

Mount Bethel met with gradual decline following the Civil War and in 1882 the congregation totalled only 60 members.

Mount Bethel's isolation from any major thoroughfares in the 19th and early 20th centuries probably dissuaded further settlement, except by dedicated farmers. These factors, which were not favorable to the Baptist religion, probably prevented the rehabilitation or destruction of the Meetinghouse at that time.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Mount Bethel Baptist Church Minutes. Books #1-7 (1802-1964).
- "Notes on the Baptist Churches at Mount Bethel", Dr. Edmund James. Somerset County Historical Quarterly, 1918, Volume 7, Number 2 (pp. 118-122)
- Materials Towards a History of the Baptists in New Jersey. Edward Morgan, 1792, Volume II.
- Scotch Plains Baptist Church Minutes. (1767 and 1768)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1.

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|------------------|---------------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1, 8 | 5, 4, 1, 0, 4, 0 | 4, 4, 9, 8, 4, 7, 0 | B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | | | | D | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Terry Karschner, Historian-Curator

July, 1975

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Section, Dept. of Environmental Protection

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 1420

TELEPHONE

(609) 292-2023

CITY OR TOWN

Trenton

STATE

New Jersey

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

[Handwritten Signature]

TITLE Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection

DATE

DEC 22 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

6/3/76

ATTEST:

[Handwritten Signature]

DATE

6-2-76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

RBR for WSM 6-2-76

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (cont.)

The late 20th century, however, is not bypassing Warren Township and although still rural, suburban development is changing that character. The Mount Bethel Baptist congregation grew so rapidly that a new church was constructed in 1960 and the old one abandoned.

ARCHITECTURE

Mount Bethel Baptist Meetinghouse is a representative example of the simple church structures erected throughout the North American colonies in the 18th century. Purely a functional building, Mount Bethel reflects the austerity and frugality practiced by the congregation at this time. In addition, being basically unaltered through modern times the church is one of New Jersey's few concrete cultural links with Religion in the 18th century.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- A History of the Mount Bethel Baptist Church. James S. Mallette. 1854.
History of the Mount Bethel Baptist Church. Joan Myers. 1967.
History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey. James P. Snell.
1881 (pp. 856-8)
History of Scotch Plains Baptist Church. Rev. J. H. Parks. 1897 (p. 11)
History of Baptists in New Jersey. Thomas S. Griffiths. 1904.
(pp. 281-4)
Robert Erskine Maps. Number 70D, 1779.