

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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

Oakland Memorial Chapel, Alcorn University

AND/OR COMMON

Alcorn University

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Alcorn State University Campus

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Alcorn

VICINITY OF Lorman

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Mississippi

CODE

28

COUNTY

Claiborne

CODE

021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Alcorn State University

STREET & NUMBER

Alcorn College Station

CITY, TOWN

Alcorn

VICINITY OF Lorman

STATE

Mississippi

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Office of the Chancery Clerk, Claiborne County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Port Gibson

STATE

Mississippi

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

National Register of Historic Places

DATE

1972

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

National Register of Historic Places, 1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

20240

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Alcorn University was the product of the Mississippi Reconstruction Legislature. The college was founded in 1871, six years after the close of the Civil War, expressly for the education of blacks, on the site which had long been set aside for the education of the white youth of the area, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas.

Oakland College was founded in 1828 in Claiborne County, Mississippi "amidst a beautiful oak grove, gently undulating and clothed in a perennial dress of green verdure that is pleasing to the eye and conducive to health and quietude." This campus was purchased by the state at a cost of \$40,000. Of this original campus there are three structures which remain. These are the President's Mansion, the Belles Lettres Building, and Oakland Memorial Chapel. The first two of these buildings have been greatly altered and modified for perpetual usage. Extensive alterations, additions and modernization have reduced their integrity. For this reason, it is impractical to include them as a part of this nomination.

Alcorn University, on the other hand, is a bustling modern university campus. The cogs of progress have turned rapidly and the sites of the original structures have been lost. The only structure which retains the character of the original campus is Oakland Chapel.

Built as one of the first of the original buildings at Oakland College in 1838, Oakland Chapel, an example of the Greek Revival style, is located on a low, crescent-shaped ridge on the grounds of Alcorn University seven miles northwest of Lorman, Mississippi. It is a temple-front building, three stories in height, dominated by a raised portico consisting of six columns approximating the Tuscan order, full entablature, and pediment. A cast iron stair, designed with heavy columnar newels and risers pierced in a floral pattern, rises on the center axis to the main floor. The composition is topped by a cupola designed with fluted Doric columns set between corner piers. A full entablature, with triglyphs, metopes, and mutules, extends uninterrupted around the cupola. A balustrade once rested on the entablature but was removed during the 1958 restoration.

The building is constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond on the facade and in common bond on the ground floor and the side and rear elevations. The fenestration pattern is regular and strictly symmetrical. The facade is five-bays wide with entrance doors on the ground and main floors. Unmolded reveals are let into the spandrels and are stuccoed and painted on the facade elevation. Windows are double-hung with twelve-over-twelve glazing encased within a narrow, beaded architrave finished with a rolled backband. The windows of the front elevation are replacements but closely follow the original design. The main entrance consists of a double-leaf door with single vertical panels, flanking sidelights, and a large, twelve-pane transom. The opening is enriched by a massive yet simple Greek Revival frontispiece composed of pilasters, full entablature, and abstract pedimental form.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" 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)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

Afro-American History

SPECIFIC DATES **1871**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT **Slave Labor /Not known**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Alcorn University is historically significant because it was the first land grant college in the nation founded exclusively for blacks. Established by the Mississippi state legislature six years after the end of the Civil War, the university was founded in the midst of the black Reconstruction era when it seemed, a few years, that the plight of black folk would be better. Mississippi's white political leaders were fearful that the state's black citizens would seek admission to the white state university. Hiram R. Revels, who became its first president, in his memoirs wrote of the founding that he and Governor Alcorn "prepared a bill for the establishing of Alcorn University and presented it first to the Senate and then to the House of Representatives.... As a compliment to me, the legislature styled it Revels University but on my earnest solicitation it was named for the Governor, Alcorn University."

This first state land grant college for blacks, created by an act of the Mississippi legislature, May 13, 1871, was located on a site which had long been set aside for the education of the white youth of the area, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas.

Oakland College was founded in 1828, in Claiborne County. The founder was the Reverend Jeremiah Chamberlain who convinced the Presbyterians of Mississippi that there was a need for such a college. By 1840 this college had 250 acres of land and an endowment of \$50,000. And at that time, the president, in describing the growth of the campus mentioned the progress of construction by skilled black craftsmen of the college's main building, "150 by 65 feet ... three stories high." That main building was Oakland Chapel.

The decade of tension, 1850-1860, which culminate in the Civil War and closure of the college, in its initial year, saw the demise of the college's founder. The Reverend Jeremiah Chamberlain, a Whig and a unionist, was assassinated by an advocate of secession. The college was opened again after the war, but was "being pressed beyond measure by some outstanding debts and suffering from want of patronage" when it was sold to the state of Mississippi for \$40,000.

Alcorn State University began operations under the guidance of one of the most distinguished blacks of the Reconstruction Era, Hiram R. Revels. Born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, September 27, 1827, Revels was educated in Fayetteville and later in Indiana. In the years before the war he was a preacher and sometimes a teacher in Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri. He was in Maryland during the War and played a role in organizing regiments of black troops to fight in that war. After the Civil War he became involved in politics and in religious activities in Mississippi. In 1870 he was elected to the United States Senate, the first black man in history to attain that office. (He served in that office with distinction and at the end of his term his friend Governor Alcorn wrote that he had dignified

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The plan of the main floor, which is repeated on the upper or third floor consists of a spacious center stairhall and two flanking chambers occupying the forward third of the building, and a large, two story chapel occupying the remaining area. The woodwork of the secondary spaces is largely confined to the center hall. The stair consists of a single flight with winders at the top, a tapered octagonal newel, a ramped banister, and rectangular-sectioned balusters. The doorways which communicate with the flanking chambers are hung with vertically-paneled doors fitted with reproduction rim locks. The frames are designed with battered and eared architraves supporting a plain box cornice, the customary frieze having been entirely omitted. The chapel door, the most important of the interior doorways, repeats the basic form of the entrance door and frontispiece but eliminates the transom and pediment.

The two-story space occupied by the chapel is fitted with a gallery running along the back and side walls. Notable woodwork original to the room includes a flush-paneled dado which is repeated, with a balustrade, as the gallery railing, and the pews with their paneled and ramped end-boards. Of special interest is the wooden reredos placed directly opposite the entrance on the dias. Its design is based on the traditional tabernacle frame form with coupled pilasters, triple-facia architrave, plain frieze, and cornice with bead and reel, egg and dart, and enriched talon carving highlighted with color. The composition is completed by a low pediment with three gilt antefixae. Other special decorative features include a plaster chandelier medallion and bands of geometrically-patterned designs stencilled at the cornice and just above the dado level. During the 1958 restoration, the stencilled designs now painted a bright blue were retouched, following the faded evidence of the original.

Of the original fabric of the two main floors, most remains intact, the notable exception being the disappearance of the stoves served by the twelve small chimneys. The ground floor, however, retains very little of its original finish. This level, which continues to be used for classrooms, has undergone heavy remodeling that has left only one original eight-paneled door intact. The plan, which may follow the original, consists of a center hall running the full length of the building with entrances at either end and four rooms on each side. At the front of the building, the hall widens to accommodate a modern stair, which is undoubtedly in the location of the original stairway.

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service for him in the state of Mississippi. Revels had already declined other employment, "I preferred remaining in Mississippi where I could be more beneficial to my race."

While Revels was president of the college, fulfilling his political ambitions, as well, the state legislature reorganized the institution and made it a land grant college, in 1878. The name was to be changed to that of Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College. The states funds from the Morrill Act, July 2, 1862, in the Agricultural Land Scrip Fund in 1878 was \$227,150.00. This money was divided between the white land grant college at Starkeville and Alcorn A & M College. Thus the college acquired an endowment of \$113,575.00 and received that year in interest, \$5,678.75.

John H. Burrus became president in 1882, and he and those who followed him during the remaining years of the nineteenth century supported a continuing and growing emphasis on agricultural and industrial education. This emphasis on industrial and agricultural education was so great that in 1888 it was reported that less than five percent of the 7,273 students in twenty-three of the leading "higher schools" for Blacks were "engaged in what are now considered classical studies."

John H. Burrus was president of the college from the time of the resignation of Senator Revels, 1882 until 1893. Burrus, aided by his brother, James Burrus, made the college one of the first modern State Colleges for blacks, maintaining high standards of scholarship. The Burrus presidency was followed by those of Wilt Reynolds, 1893-1894, and Thomas J. Calloway. President Calloway was the first to propose that the college become coeducational. His plea for the admission of women students was not immediately successful.

Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College became a coeducational institution during the presidency of Witt Lanier. It should be noted that women had been in attendance during the progressive Burrus years, 1883-1893, and that one "Beulah Turner Robinson in 1888 became the first Black woman in the nation to graduate from a state supported institution." Lanier's emphasis on education for women led to the construction of Truly Hall, 1903, and to the employment of women faculty for instruction of the new class of students in "sewing, cooking, laundering and in nurse training."

The history of the college during the first third of the twentieth century was closely allied to the life and time of L. J. Rowan. Rowan became president in 1905, served until 1911, when he was replaced by J. A. Martin. Martin's presidency ended in 1915, where upon Rowan returned to the presidency and remained in office until 1934.

Rowan and Martin were graduates of the college. Martin's presidency was very progressive for the college and physical plant received vast improvements. Martin, who was aware of the financial problems of Mississippi youth who wanted college training, began an evening college.

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During the Rowan eras Alcorn became one of the states most influential institutions. This was an era wherein the Booker T. Washington's Atlanta speech, 'compromise' dominated and the college became the states principal exponent of the 'compromise'.

Agricultural and Mechanical came to include all of the trades. Young blacks from the rural areas of the state came to the college to be trained as agricultural teachers, farmer's advisors and home economics specialists. Education was available in other areas of trades and in the liberal arts. Mississippi and other Southern states, while their demagogues stridently insisted that their states were sovereign, eagerly sought federal funds to support various state activities. The Department of Agriculture was an important source of such funds. A statewide system of vocational high schools was established. Among black educators the most lucrative positions available were those as vocational teachers in such schools. Salaries for vocational teachers in these schools were supplemented by federal funds and consequently these teachers became an elite class among black educators.

Throughout the Rowan years Alcorn A & M College suffered severely from inadequate state support. This neglect forced the Rowan administration to be most frugal in its expenditures and Black state colleges in this era husbanded their inadequate financial resources. President Rowan reported in 1924, "Our first great handicap, and fundamentally, the cause of all the others, is the Support Fund that is too small for a plant such as ours." \$50,000 was the state's total contribution to the support of the college in that year.

In the midst of the great depression Dr. Rowan was retired from office and Dr. William H. Bell became president. During his administration the college made rapid improvements in the quality of training of the faculty and in improvement of the physical plant.

The program at the institution became more diversified and included the classical arts as well as vocational training. The college's science department attained high academic excellence. Almost all of Mississippi's black physicians and dentist are graduates of the college. Colleges and universities throughout the country have Alcorn State University graduates on their faculties. The college's graduates have distinguished themselves and their alma mater in numerous aspects of American life.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY

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The original campus of Oakland College has been severely impacted with the advances of Alcorn University. Though several structures dating from the 1830s - 40s period remain, their integrity has been severely reduced by modern additions and alterations. Recent development has led to the destruction of other significant buildings and the obliteration of historic sites. For this reason the selection of the Chapel as commemorative of the historic property is most appropriate.

Beginning at the point of intersection of Route 552 and a service street, proceed in an easterly direction along the north curb of this service street, a distance of approximately 175 feet, then due north approximately 80 feet, to a point of equal distance between the Chapel and a building on its north side, then proceed due west to Route 552, then south along the east curb of Route 552, to the point of origin.

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CONTINUATION SHEET RESEARCHERS

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Norfolk, Virginia 23504
October 30, 1975