

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

119 North Tenth Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Reading

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

___ VICINITY OF

6

STATE

Pennsylvania

CODE

42

COUNTY

Berks

CODE

*011***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

Bethel A.M.E. Church *Attention: Richard Johnson*

STREET & NUMBER

608 North 6th Street

CITY, TOWN

Reading

___ VICINITY OF

Pennsylvania

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.*Berks County Courthouse*

STREET & NUMBER

Sixth and Court Streets

CITY, TOWN

Reading

STATE

*Pennsylvania***6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

*1-22-79*___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS*Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*

CITY, TOWN

Harrisburg

STATE

Pennsylvania

7 DESCRIPTION**CONDITION**

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The AME Society building at 119 North Tenth Street is a 2½ story brick and stucco structure with a gable roof built in 1837. Located at the corner of the south and west elevations is a 3 story brick tower with a pyramidal roof, topped with a finial. The structure today is 4 bays by 2 bays. In c. 1867-69, the building was rebuilt and was later remodeled in 1889. Records show that the brick front facade was added at the time of the 1889 remodeling.

Windows in the original section are 6 over 6, double hung sash with tone sills. Windows on the 2nd story are elongated, with 5 lights, and a rounded arch. These windows contain early 19th century stained glass. Windows in the 1889 additions are similar in style. First story windows are 2 over 2, double hung sash with heavy stone lintels and sills. The main door is located in the tower section of the 1st story. This double panelled door has a stained glass fanlight with the words, Bethel AME Church. A cornerstone to the right of the door reads Remodeled 1898. Located between the 1st and 2nd story windows is a section of decorative brickwork in a checkerboard pattern. Above this pattern is a double set of windows with a circular inset under a common radiating brick arch. The five light, round arched window over the door has an identical arch.

The pediment and tower are separated from the second story by wide cornice. Located in the gable end is a palladian window. Sets of paired, louvered windows are located in the tower.

The interior of the church was plain in style and design. Beyond the stairwell located in the remodeled section of the interior was only one large room on both the first and second floors. A raised dias surrounded by a wooden railing served to separate the sanctuary from the congregation.

SO. 10th St. N. W. 119
 S. 10th St. N. W. 119

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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1837, 1867-69, 1889.

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Samuel Murray, George Dillen,
Jacob Ross, Isaac Parker

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is the only black church in Berks County built with the private resources of its congregation. A total of only three black churches are known, from this county, the other two have been demolished.

The building was erected with the resources of a small group of people belonging to the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded by Richard Allen of Philadelphia in 1791. Four local men were largely responsible for its construction: Samuel Murray, George Dillen, Jacob Ross, and Isaac Parker. Sam Murray can rightly be called the founding father. Murray, a free black man and shoemaker by trade, owned 13 other properties, used his properties and collateral to finance the construction of the church, received a licence to preach, and became the first local pastor.

The first itinerant ministers sent to serve the Reading congregation from 1835 to 1845, by the Philadelphia Annual Conference, were very close associates of Richard Allen, the founder of the Mother Church.

The development of the black church in Pennsylvania was a slow and scattered process, with the concentration of effort on the cities such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The rural areas had small black populations until after the Civil War. The development of a black church using the sole resources of its congregation in 1837 in Reading was a significant pioneering effort of the AME movement in Pennsylvania. Blacks were employed in the iron fabricating establishments of Berks County and a few were held as slaves long before the 19th century. The Act of 1780 required all owners of slaves to list their holdings in the office of the Court of Quarter Sessions. Among early slave holders, Jonas Selly owned slaves as early as 1766.

The population of Reading in 1840 was 8,410 by 1847 the population had jumped to 13,044. There was an extreme housing shortage during this period of growth. For the 2,398 families recorded there were only 2,138 homes. Although some blacks owned land before 1800, the census of 1860 reports only 497 blacks.

Finally, it ought to be noted that the resources of Bethel AME Church were occasionally used to harbor fugitive slaves. Indeed, Jacob Ross, one of the founders, was a run-away slave from Virginia. The Church records have been maintained and preserved. These records will be microfilmed and placed in the church building as a source for further research and study of Black History. Further use of the building will be to use it as a cultural center for the arts with emphasis on the black contribution. The building will also serve as a museum displaying artifacts from not only the antebellum period, but contemporary as well.

In addition, the building will serve as a referral center focussing its attention on the needs of people residing in center city. It will also be the home of cultural, lectures pertaining to the history, religious and social concerns of black people.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME _____

QUADRANGLE SCALE _____

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 | 4220210 | 4465400
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

D [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

E [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

F [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

G [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

H [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard G. Johnson, Trustee

ORGANIZATION

Bethel AME Church

STREET & NUMBER

608 North 6th Street

CITY OR TOWN

Reading

DATE

TELEPHONE

215-929-5311

STATE

Pennsylvania

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

TITLE

*Ed Weintraub
 State Historic Preservation Officer*

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Montgomery, Morton L. History of Berks County. Philadelphia:
Everts, Peck and Richards, 1886.

Payne, Daniel A. History of The African Methodist Church.
New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969.

Stahle, William. Borough of Reading. Reading: Knobb and
Boyer, 1841.

Wayman, Alexander W. Cyclopedia of African Methodism.
Baltimore: Methodist Book Depository, 1882.

Articles

Homan, Wayne E. "The Underground Railroad," Historical
Review of Berks County. Fall, 1958, Vol. XXIII, No. 4.

Marcus, Chester L. "Washington Street Presbyterian Church,"
Historical Review of Berks County. July 1954, Vol. XIX,
No. 4.

Manuscripts

Church Minutes, 1834 to 1847. Bethel A.M.E. Church, (in the
files of the church)

Johnson, Richard G. A Social History of Bethel A.M.E. Church,
Reading, Pa.: First Twenty-five Years, 1834 to 1859.
Master's Thesis to be completed May, 1979. Morgan State
University, Baltimore, Md.

(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Berks County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

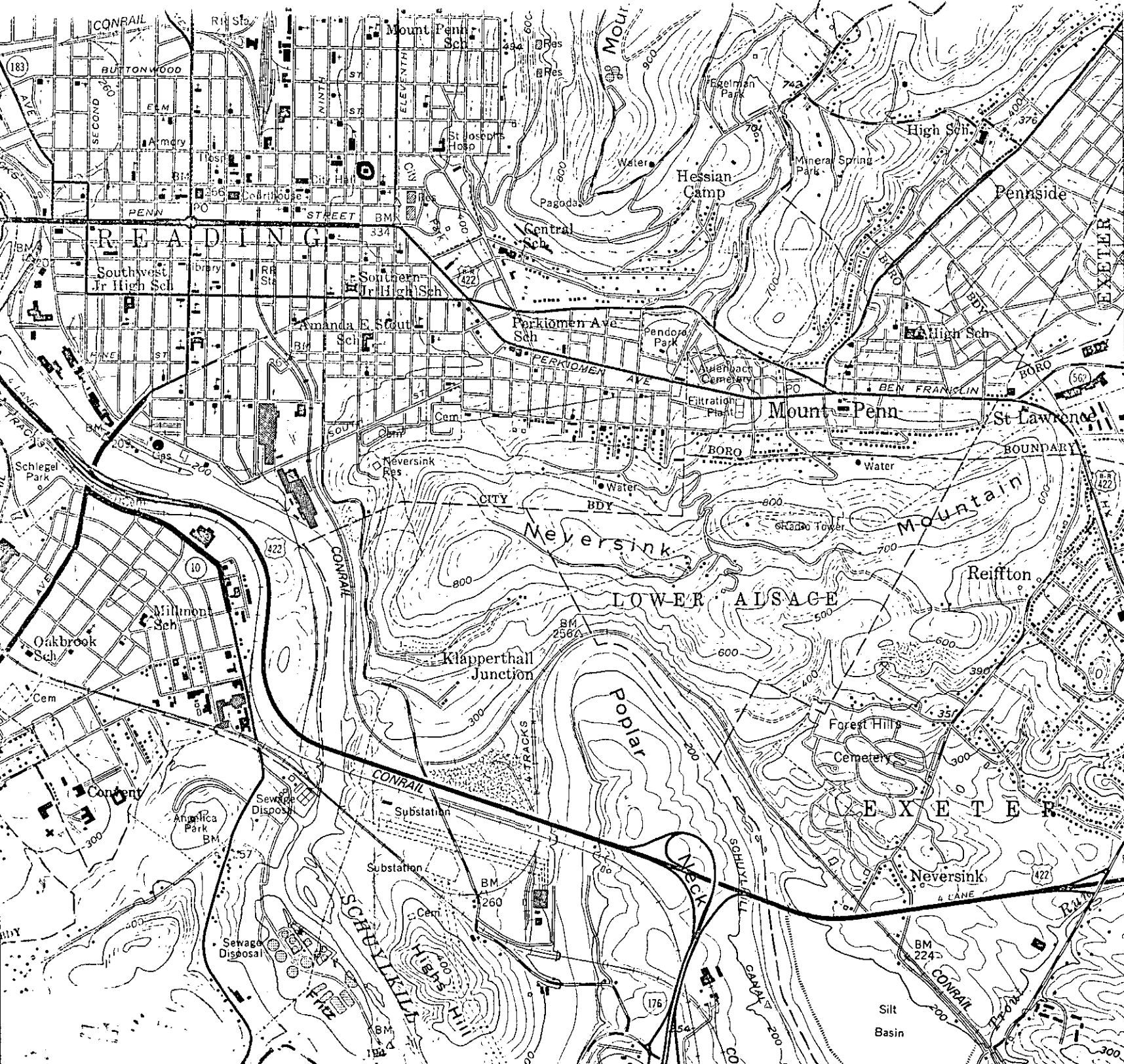
PAGE

The historical distinction of this building is that it is the only church in Berks County built with the private resources of the black people during the antebellum period. From its beginning, Bethel, has continued to service the Black community of Reading. As noted in section #8, many of the members began as laborers in the iron manufacturing industries of Reading, later expanding to other industries and socia-economic levels. The proposed use of the building as a referral and social center will continue its use by the black community as a focal point in their lives.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Half lot of ground situated on the East side of North Tenth Street beginning at the Northwest corner of lot marked in the general plan of the town with number 485 thence northwardly thirty feet along the Eastern line of said tenth street, thence Eastwardly through the middle of lot marked in the general plan of the town with No. 484 two hundred and thirty feet to a twenty feet alley, thence along same Southwardly thirty feet to the North East corner of said lot No. 485, thence along same Westwardly two hundred and thirty feet to the place of beginning. It being the Southernmost half of said lot marked as aforesaid No. 484 and being also part of the same business of Henry Auge the Elder.

* The lot on which the building
stand is $\frac{1}{10}$ ACRE IN SIZE.



446
 20
 ST. LAWRENCE 0.6 MI.
 BOYERTOWN 13 MI.
 443
 BAUMSTOWN 4.5 MI.
 DOUGLASVILLE 9.2 MI.
 442
 (BIRDSBORO)
 5864 IV SE
 441
 BAUMSTOWN 5 MI.
 PHILADELPHIA 45 MI.

27

4465400
 Modist