

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

NAME

HISTORIC

WESLEY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH

AND/OR COMMON

Big Wesley

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1500 Lombard Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3rd

STATE

Pennsylvania

VICINITY OF

CODE
42

COUNTY

Philadelphia

CODE

101

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Trust
for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in America

STREET & NUMBER

1500 Lombard Street

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE
REGISTRY OF DEEDS ETC.

Philadelphia County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

Pennsylvania

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

3/7/78

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

CITY, TOWN

Harrisburg

STATE

Pennsylvania

DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church, situated on the Southwest corner of 15th and Lombard Streets, is a two-story, Gothic, stone church, rectangular in shape. It is bounded on the south by Naudain Street (alley) immediately across from the now abandoned Sahara Hotel. It is bounded on the west by a small antique shop and row houses which continue the remainder of the block. The pinnacle on the east front of the building supports the Gothic stone bell tower. Immediately below the tower, dominating the entire front of the building is a huge stained glass window. Below the stained glass window on the street level are three red doors, two small flanking the larger door in the center, all under Gothic arches and lintels.

The 15th Street side of the church is dominated by stained glass windows at the sanctuary level and below these are frosted glass windows, in Gothic arch frames, as are the windows above. At the ground level, three-quarters above ground are frosted glass windows which are lights into the basement dining area. At the corner of the building is another pair of red doors under Gothic arches and lintels.

At the street level, the doors open onto a red ceramic tile floor, flanked by stairs to the sanctuary upper level and to the dining room lower level. The Tillman Chapel is located immediately off the lobby, facing the front door. This is a simple, small sanctuary with a small nave with a raised platform and a centered pulpit. The nave and the narthex are flanked by offices on each side.

The sanctuary, located on the upper level of the building, is surrounded by stained glass with large full-walled stained glass windows front and rear and smaller memorial stained glass windows on each side the entire length of the sanctuary. The nave is pulpit centered, rising four feet above the floor. Beneath the platform is a Baptismal pool. Immediately to the rear of the pulpit, behind a carved wood wall is the choir loft. The organ console is located in the center of the choir loft, flanked by chairs on each side. The pipe organ is a C. S. Haskell, which company went out of business in 1921. It is a two-manual organ with a wooden roll top console. The pipes are enclosed in stone plastic arches. The sanctuary, which seats approximately two thousand people, contains a "U" shaped balcony. The lower level begins with restrooms below the lobby on each side of the lower level lobby. Double doors separate the dining room from the lobby which is a simple rectangular room with supporting posts on each side of the room. The kitchen is to the rear of the dining room separated by a counter and large frosted glass windows.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 1925-1926

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Following approximately thirty years of missionary work in the U.S., the Church of England through John Wesley approved the appointment of Dr. Thomas Coke as head of the new Methodist churches in America. In 1784 there were over 15,000 Methodists in the U.S. During this entire developmental period there had been an uneasy and unsolved situation with the black members, who were joining the Methodists in increasing numbers. The resulting increase in segregation ultimately led to the formation of two separate Methodist churches. In Philadelphia led by Richard Allen, a group of concerned blacks formed their own congregation which was known as Mother Bethel. Richard Allen was elected as the first bishop of the new African Methodist Episcopal Church. Four years after Bethel severed its relationship with the Methodist Episcopal Church and became independent, some of its members became dissatisfied. So in June of 1820 about thirty members walked out of Bethel in dissent, with the idea of starting their own church. For about six weeks they worshiped in three different locations. Then they bought a place at 521-527 Lombard Street. There they used the former carpenter shed of Alphonso Ireland as a church until they could build a church of their own. In August of 1820 they began construction of a church at the same location. This structure was completed in 1821 and served the Wesley congregation until 1885. In 1885 they purchased an existing brick church at 1500 Lombard which they used until the construction of the present church in 1925-26.

This congregation known as Wesley joined with the Zion congregation of New York City and 4 other churches in 1821 to form the nucleus of a new church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. By 1896 the A.M.E. Zion Church had a membership of 349,788 and the A.M.E. had 452,725.

The Wesley congregation has been an instrumental leader in the development of the A.M.E. Zion movement. Eleven of Wesley's thirty-eight pastors have become bishops of the denomination.

The church was built just before the Great Depression, when building costs were at a peak. As a result, Wesley ended up in the heart of the depression with a staggering debt and dwindling picket books. That it survived is a miracle in itself. Equally amazing was its outreach to the poor and hungry of that area of Philadelphia. In the winter of 1932-33, it fed more than 34,000 people, regardless of race, creed, or color. It gave shoes and

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Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

clothing to the needy, had an apartment house where it housed people rent-free, and paid insurance premiums to prevent policies from lapsing. All this was done through money taken in from a Tuesday night service called Joy Night. Despite the church's dire financial predicament, all the money from this combined service of prayer, singing, instrumental music, and devotional exercises went to help the people.

By 1950, Big Wesley was out of debt, and in 1952, the Reverend Alfred Gilbert Dunston (now Bishop) was its pastor. One of Rev. Dunston's first actions was to enlist the aid of the congregation and local community to form an organization to clean up Lombard Street and its environs. Next, Rev. Dunston, as one of the top leaders of 400 black Philadelphia pastors, and with the active aid of his congregation, helped to spearhead what became known as the Selective Patronage Program. Through this program of boycotts, carefully selected Philadelphia companies were forced to hire black people in positions significantly higher in calibre than was the usual lot of black people. The final meeting in settling the boycott of Sun-Oil was held in the pastor's office at Wesley. The effect of this entire program was lasting and expanding as employers learned the merits of this change. But Wesley's efforts and concerns were never merely confined to local issues. The Rev. Solomon S. Seay, the leader of the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, spoke at Wesley and received from the church over \$1,000 for that cause. In the early 1960's, Rev. Dunston, realizing that the black people were not trained to do some of the jobs they would like to have, worked to change this situation. After convincing other leading black Philadelphia pastors of the merits of this program, OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) was started.

Through the years, Big Wesley, has played an important part in the improvement of social conditions and attitudes towards the Black community of Philadelphia.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Church Records.

Heisler, John W. unpublished manus

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. A Religious History of the American People.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, p. 708-9.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .16

QUADRANGLE NAME Philadelphia

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 485680 4421400

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION That lot situate at the southwest corner of Lombard and 15th Sts. in the 7th ward of the City of Philadelphia, containing in front or breadth on the said Lombard St., 62 feet and extending in length or depth along 15th st. 114 feet to Naudain Street

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

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mr. John W. Heisler

ORGANIZATION

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

232 West Marshall Road

TELEPHONE

215-MA6-0281

CITY OR TOWN

Lansdowne

STATE

Pennsylvania

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, Director
Office of Historic Preservation

DATE

6-21-78

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



PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA CO
CAMDEN CO

PENNSYLVANIA
NEW JERSEY

CAMDEN

4424

4423

4422

4421

4420

57°30"

2.7 MI. TO U.S. 130
ATLANTIC CITY 62 MI.

5963 1 NE
(CAMDEN)