D-591

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Architectural Survey File

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site (mht.maryland.gov) for details about how to make an appointment.

All material is property of the Maryland Historical Trust.

Last Updated: 01-31-2013
D-591
Bethel A. M. E. Church
Cambridge
Founded c. 1847, 1903
Public Worship

The Bethel A.M.E. Church is clearly one of the most significant landmarks of African-American history and development in Dorchester County. Second to the Waugh Chapel Methodist congregation established in 1826, the Bethel A.M.E. membership was begun around 1847, which was when a fledgling group of members purchased property bordering Pine Street. The present building, the third to house this congregation, is a well detailed Gothic Revival brick edifice dominated by asymmetrical towers. Three pointed arch window and door openings, enhanced with corbelled brick heads, mark the first floor front. A marble datestone documents the construction of this structure in 1903. Since the Waugh congregation replaced its Victorian church in the late twentieth century, this is the oldest African-American church structure in the city of Cambridge, and its active congregation remains a vital part of the community.

On the 23rd of December 1847, Dr. Thomas H. Handy and his wife Sarah conveyed a parcel of land measuring 98' across by 200' deep to a group of free black residents of Cambridge for $125. Named first as one of the grantees was the congregation’s evident first minister Simon Brown, and the other trustees named in the conveyance included Spencer Young, Washington Jolly, Henry Washington, Joseph Brown, William Banks, William Hill, Chamberlain Bowley, and Joseph Marine. Evidently the young congregation worshipped across the street since the lot on the west side was mortgaged to William Dail, a former sheriff, in exchange for use of a building
on the east side of Pine. As the African-American population in the county seat increased, so did the congregation's ability to rebuild, first in 1870 and a second time with this ambitious common bond brick structure in 1903.
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

1. Name of Property
   (indicate preferred name)
   historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
   other

2. Location
   street and number 623 Pine Street
   city, town Cambridge
   county Dorchester

3. Owner of Property
   (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)
   name Trustees of Bethel A.M.E. Church
   street and number 623 Pine Street
   telephone 410-
   city, town Cambridge
   state MD
   zip code 21613

4. Location of Legal Description
   courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dorchester County Clerk of Court
   liber WJ 4 folio 36
   city, town Cambridge
   tax map 302 tax parcel 2561 tax ID number 7-17651

5. Primary Location of Additional Data
   Contributing Resource in National Register District
   Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
   Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
   Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
   Recorded by HABS/HAER
   Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
   Other:

6. Classification
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<td>industry</td>
<td>other:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory
7. Description

Condition

|x | excellent | [ ] | deteriorated |
|___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ | good | [ ] | ruined |
| ___ | fair | [ ] | altered |

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

The Bethel A.M.E. Church, built in 1903, is a large nine-course common bond brick church that stands at 623 Pine Street on the northwest corner of the intersection of Pine and Bethel streets in Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland. The asymmetrically designed Victorian church faces east with the gable roof oriented on an east/west axis. The steeply pitched roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The sanctuary interior survives with much of its original period fabric. Attached to the back of the church is a two-story Sunday School and administrative wing that dates to the mid twentieth century.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Bethel A. M. E. Church is a large nine-course common bond brick structure that stands at 623 Pine Street in the center of the Pine Street Neighborhood Historic District in Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland. Built in 1903, the three-bay by five-bay brick church faces east with its gable roof oriented on an east/west axis. An asymmetrical façade of uneven corner towers flank a center bay topped by a three-sided parapet wall. Fixed in the corner of the northeast corner of the north tower is a marble datestone inscribed, “Union Bethel A. M. E. Church, Built 1870, Rebuilt 1903.” Attached to the back of the church is a mid twentieth century Sunday School and administrative wing erected in frame and concrete block.

The east (main) façade is an asymmetrical three-bay elevation with uneven towers on each of the outer corners. The southeast tower rises the equivalent of four stories with the corner defined by buttresses. The east face of the first story is pierced by a large pointed arch window and door combination with a corbelled brickwork accenting the point of the colored glass window, which is fixed directly above a single width door opening. Piercing the tower wall surface above the doorway is a lobed triangular shaped window fitted with a tripartite pattern of repeating lobed crosses. The top two sides of the triangular opening are accented with raised brickwork while the bottom side is finished with a brick rowlock sill. The uppermost surface of the tower is pierced by a round window framed by a brick rowlock border. The top few courses of brickwork of the southeast tower have been rebuilt with a mid twentieth century brick. The center bay is recessed back from the front plane of the tower, and centered in the wall surface is a large double-door opening topped by a large pointed arch colored glass window. The top two sides of the Gothic arched window are edged in corbelled brickwork. The window opening is fitted with a circular pattern infilled with a four-part pattern of tripartite lobed forms. Fixed above the combination door and window is a round window opening with a raised brickwork highlighting the top half of the circular window. The northeast tower is the equivalent of three stories with a single width door opening and colored glass window fitted within a Gothic arched opening. The same corbelled brickwork frames the top curved sides of the pointed arch window. The upper level of the tower is pierced by a round window as well, and its top half is
edged with raised brickwork. The outside corners of the northeast tower, like the southeast tower, are trimmed with corner buttresses. The top edge of the squared off tower is finished with decorative corbelled brickwork that stretches across the crest of the wall between the buttresses.

The north and south side elevations are largely alike with each façade divided into five bays by protruding brick columns that terminate under the extended eave. Each bay is pierced by a Gothic arched window filled with colored glass, and the window heads are trimmed with raised brickwork.
Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Bethel A.M.E. Church is clearly one of the most significant landmarks of African-American history and development in Dorchester County. Second to the Waugh Chapel Methodist congregation established in 1826, the Bethel A.M.E. membership is thought to have formed around 1847 with the purchase of property bordering Pine Street. The present building, the third to define this location, is an well detailed Gothic Revival brick edifice dominated by asymmetrical towers the three pointed arch window and door openings by decorative corbelled brickwork. A marble datestone documents the construction of this structure to 1903. Since the Waugh congregation replaced its Victorian church in the late twentieth century, this is the oldest African-American church structure in the city of Cambridge, and its active congregation remains a vital part of the community.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

On the 23rd of December 1847, Dr. Thomas H. Handy and his wife Sarah conveyed a parcel of land measuring 98’ across by 200’ deep to a group of free black residents of Cambridge for $125. Named first in the transaction was the congregation’s early minister Simon Brown, and the other trustees named in the conveyance included Spencer Young, Washington Jolly, Henry Washington, Joseph Brown William Banks, William Hill, Chamberlain Bowley, and Joseph Marine. Evidently the young congregation worshipped across the street since the lot on the west side was mortgaged to William Dail in exchange for use of a building on the east side of Pine. As the African-American community in Cambridge developed, the Bethel congregation financed the construction of a new sanctuary in 1870, which was replaced in 1903 with the large Gothic Revival sanctuary with its distinctive corner towers.

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1 Dorchester County Land Record, WJ 4/36, 23 December 1847, Dorchester County Courthouse.
Maryland Historical Trust  
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name: Bethel A. M. E. Church  
Continuation Sheet

Number _8_ Page 1

Bethel A. M. E. Church  
601 Pine Street  
Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland

Map 302, Parcel 2561

WJ 4/36  
Thomas H. Handy and Sarah his wife

to

12.23.1847  
Simon Brown, Spencer Young, Washington Jolly, Henry Washington,  
Joseph Brown, William Banks, William Hill, Chamberlain Bowley,  
Joseph Marine, Trustees

$125 ...all and singular a certain lot or piece of land situate, lying and  
being in the Town of Cambridge, and on Pine Street, fronting on said  
Pine Street ninety eight feet, and running back two hundred feet to a line  
drawn straight from the corner of John Jackson’s lot to Benjamin  
Woodard’s lot and measures one hundred and eighty six feet in back  
end, and adjoins the lot of Thomas Plowman, let it be called whatever  
name it may be and the quantity of acres, more or less...in trust that  
they shall erect, or cause to be built thereon, a House of place of  
Worship for the use of the African Methodist Bethel Church in the  
United States of America, according to the rules and discipline of said  
Church...

1870  
Construction of second sanctuary as inscribed on datestone

1903  
Construction date of replacement Gothic Revival church, inscribed  
on datestone
9. Major Bibliographical References

Dorchester County Land Records, various volumes, Dorchester County Courthouse.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property: 28,300 square feet
Acreage of historical setting: Unknown acreage of lot
Quadrangle name: Cambridge, Maryland
Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The metes and bounds of this property are coincidental with the current boundary of the lot.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title: Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian
organization: Chesapeake Country Heritage & Preservation
date: 1.15.2011
street & number: P. O. Box 5
telephone: 410-651-1094
state: Maryland

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600
The Bethel A.M.E. Church is clearly one of the most significant landmarks of African-American history and development in Dorchester County. Second to the Waugh Chapel Methodist congregation established in 1826, the Bethel A.M.E. membership was begun around 1847, which was when a fledgling group of members purchased property bordering Pine Street. The present building, the third to house this congregation, is a well detailed Gothic Revival brick edifice dominated by asymmetrical towers. Three pointed arch window and door openings, enhanced with corbelled brick heads, mark the first floor front. A marble datestone documents the construction of this structure in 1903. Since the Waugh congregation replaced its Victorian church in the late twentieth century, this is the oldest African-American church structure in the city of Cambridge, and its active congregation remains a vital part of the community.

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Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name: Bethel A. M. E. Church

Continuation Sheet

Number: 9  Page: 2

D-591, Bethel A.M.E. Church
Cambridge, Maryland Quadrangle
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name: Bethel A. M. E. Church
Continuation Sheet

Number 9  Page 4
Bettle A. M. E. Circuit
Cambridge, Dorchester C. M.
Southeast Elevation
2.2010, Paul B. Touart, Peter
Nitr/ind. Industrial Trust

1 of 2
UNION BETHEL
A. M. E.
CHURCH.

REBUILT 1803.
D-591
Petitioner A.M.E. Circuit
Cambridge, Dorcester
Co., MA

2. 2010, Paul B. Toomey,
Petitioner,
No. 121194 (Hist. Trust)

2 of 2
Dorchester - 591
Bethel AME Church
Cr. of Pine & Bethel Sts.
Cambridge, MD, 21613

Access: Public

Bethel AME Church stands 8' from the west side of Pine Street (at the corner of Bethel). The building faces east. It houses the oldest AME congregation in Cambridge. It is an impressive late Victorian brick edifice with uneven towers at the front corners. The church was built in 1870 and rebuilt in 1903. Bethel (Cambridge) and Bethel (Easton) date from the same era. The African Methodist Episcopal Church reached the Eastern Shore of Maryland about 50 years after the Church was well established on the Western Shore of the state.
MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME
   HISTORIC
   Bethel AME Church
   AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
   STREET & NUMBER
   Cr. Pine & Bethel Streets
   CITY. TOWN
   Cambridge
   VICINITY OF
   First
   CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
   Maryland
   VICINITY OF
   Cambridge

3 CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY
   DISTRICT
   BUILDING(S)
   STRUCTURE
   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
   COMMERCIAL
   PARK
   EDUCATIONAL
   ENTERTAINMENT
   PRIVATE RESIDENCE
   RELIGIOUS
   GOVERNMENT
   INDUSTRIAL
   TRANSPORTATION
   MILITARY
   OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
   NAME
   Trustees, Bethel AME Church
   C/O Rev. H.L. Camper
   Telephone #: N/A
   STREET & NUMBER
   Cr. Pine and Bethel Streets
   CITY. TOWN
   Cambridge
   VICINITY OF
   MD, 21613
   STATE, zip code

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE.
   REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
   Dorchester Co. Court House
   Liber #: WJ 4
   Folio #: 36
   CITY. TOWN
   Cambridge
   STATE
   Maryland

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
   TITLE
   N/A
   DATE
   _FEDERAL _STATE _COUNTY _LOCAL
   DEPOSITORY FOR
   SURVEY RECORDS
   CITY. TOWN
   STATE
Bethel AME stands 8' from the west side of Pine Street (at the corner of Bethel). The building faces east. It is constructed of brick and is late Victorian. There are three entrances in the front facade. The central double-wooden doors have crosses carved into the exteriors (all the doors have the same motif). Above the central doors is a frontispiece stained-glass window 16'. There are 12' stained glass windows (lancet) above the other two entrances. There are towers at the northeast and southeast corners (front) of the building). These towers are of uneven height. The southeast tower is the taller. The same 12' stained-glass lancet windows (5 in number) are on the north side. There are five more of these windows in the south side. There are buttressess on both the north and south sides (4 each). The main body of the church is gabled (east-west) a brief false front extends 5' up the east gable between the towers. A concrete block addition (Hall & Sunday School) has been added at the southwest end of the building. The building rests on a brick foundation and has a composite shingle roof.
**Bethel AME Church** is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge. It is an impressive late Victorian brick edifice with uneven towers at the front corners. The church was built in 1870 and rebuilt in 1903. Bethel (Cambridge) & Bethel (Easton) date from the same era. The African Methodist Episcopal Church reached the Eastern Shore of Maryland about 50 years after the Church was already established on the Western Shore. All AME Churches I have surveyed on the Eastern Shore date from after the Civil War.

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**CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY**
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RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438
Bethel A.M.E. Church  
Cambridge, Dorchester County, MD  
Micheal Hosford

Maryland Historical Trust, Annapolis, MD  
East elevation - detail  
2/81