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

Inventory No. D-591

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

other

2. Location

street and number 623 Pine Street ___ not for publication

city, town Cambridge ___ vicinity

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 7-176511

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

Category
____district
_x_building(s)
____structure
____site
____object

Ownership
____public
____private
____both

Current Function
____agriculture
____commerce/trade
____defense
_x_domestic
____education
____funerary
____government
____health care
____industry
____landscape
____recreation/culture
____religion
____social
____transportation
____work in progress
____unknown
____vacant/not in use
____other:

Resource Count

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory

_____

7. Description

Inventory No. D-591

Condition

x excellent ___ deteriorated
___ good ___ ruins
___ 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 vent 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 equivlant 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.

8. Significance

Inventory No. D-591

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
__ 1600-1699	__ agriculture	__ economics	__ health/medicine	__ performing arts
__ 1700-1799	__ archeology	__ education	__ industry	__ philosophy
_ 1800-1899	x architecture	__ engineering	__ invention	__ politics/government
x 1900-1999	__ art	entertainment/ recreation	__ landscape architecture	religion
__ 2000-	__ commerce	__ ethnic heritage	__ law	__ science
	__ communications	__ exploration/ settlement	__ literature	__ social history
	__ community planning		__ maritime history	x transportation
	__ conservation		__ military	__ other: ____

Specific dates	Established c. 1847	**Architect/Builder**	
Construction dates	1870, 1903		

Evaluation for:

_____ National Register _____Maryland Register ____x____not evaluated

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.[1] 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.[2] 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.

[1] Dorchester County Land Record, WJ 4/36, 23 December 1847, Dorchester County Courthouse.

[2] McElvey, Kay Najiyyah, "*Early Black Dorchester, 1776-1870: A History of the Struggle of African-Americans in Dorchester County, Maryland, To Be Free To Make Their Own Choices.*" University of Maryland, 1991, p. 356.

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-591

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

Inventory No. D-591

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

Sanborn Insurance Maps, various issues, Library of Congress.

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
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

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

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-591

Name Bethel A. M. E. Church
Continuation Sheet

Number 9 Page 1

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.

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Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-591

Name Bethel A. M. E. Church
Continuation Sheet

Number 9 Page 2

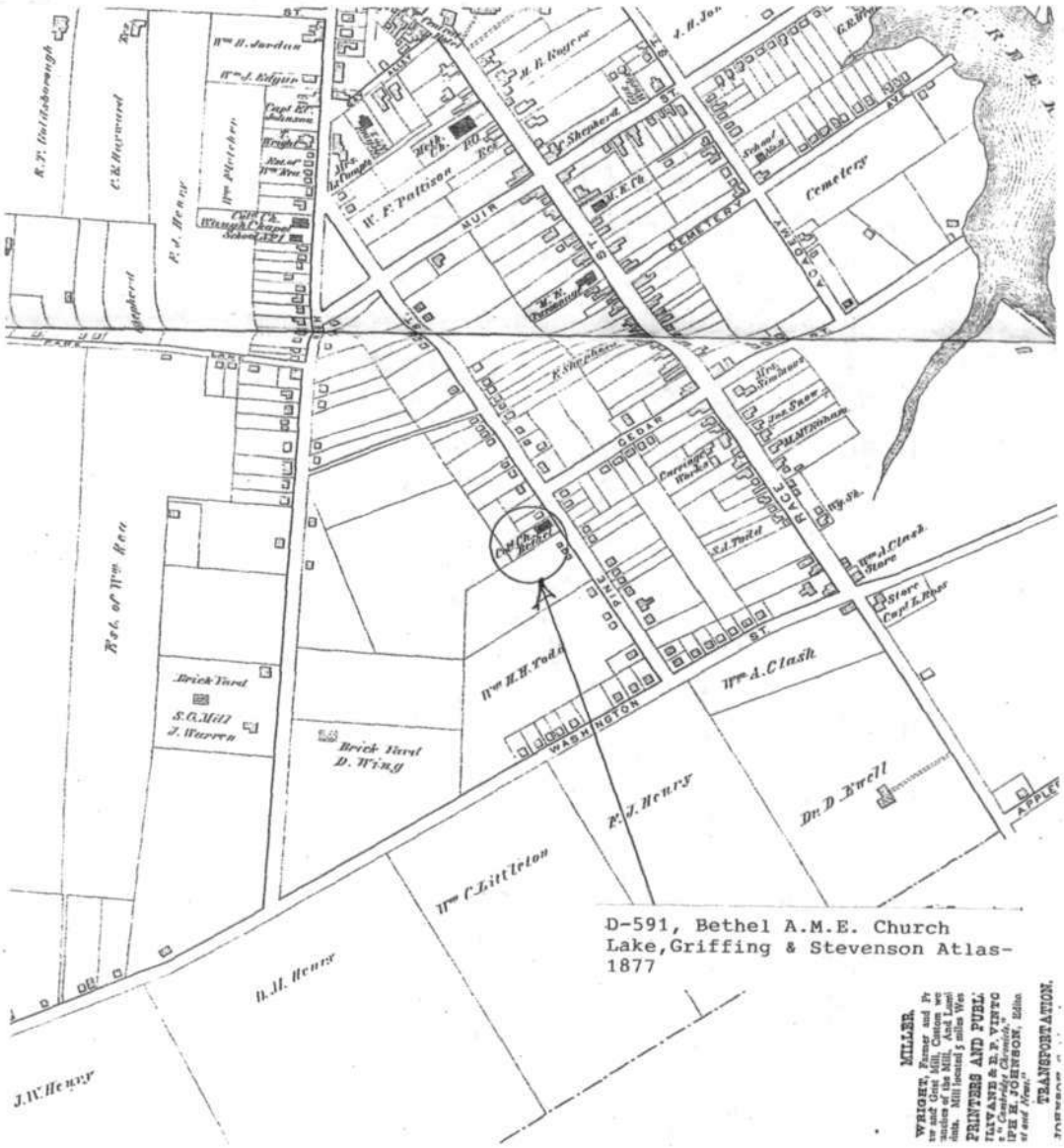
D-591, Bethel A.M.E. Church
Cambridge, Maryland Quadrangle

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-591

Name Bethel A. M. E. Church
Continuation Sheet

Number 9 Page 3



D-591, Bethel A.M.E. Church
Lake,Griffing & Stevenson Atlas-
1877

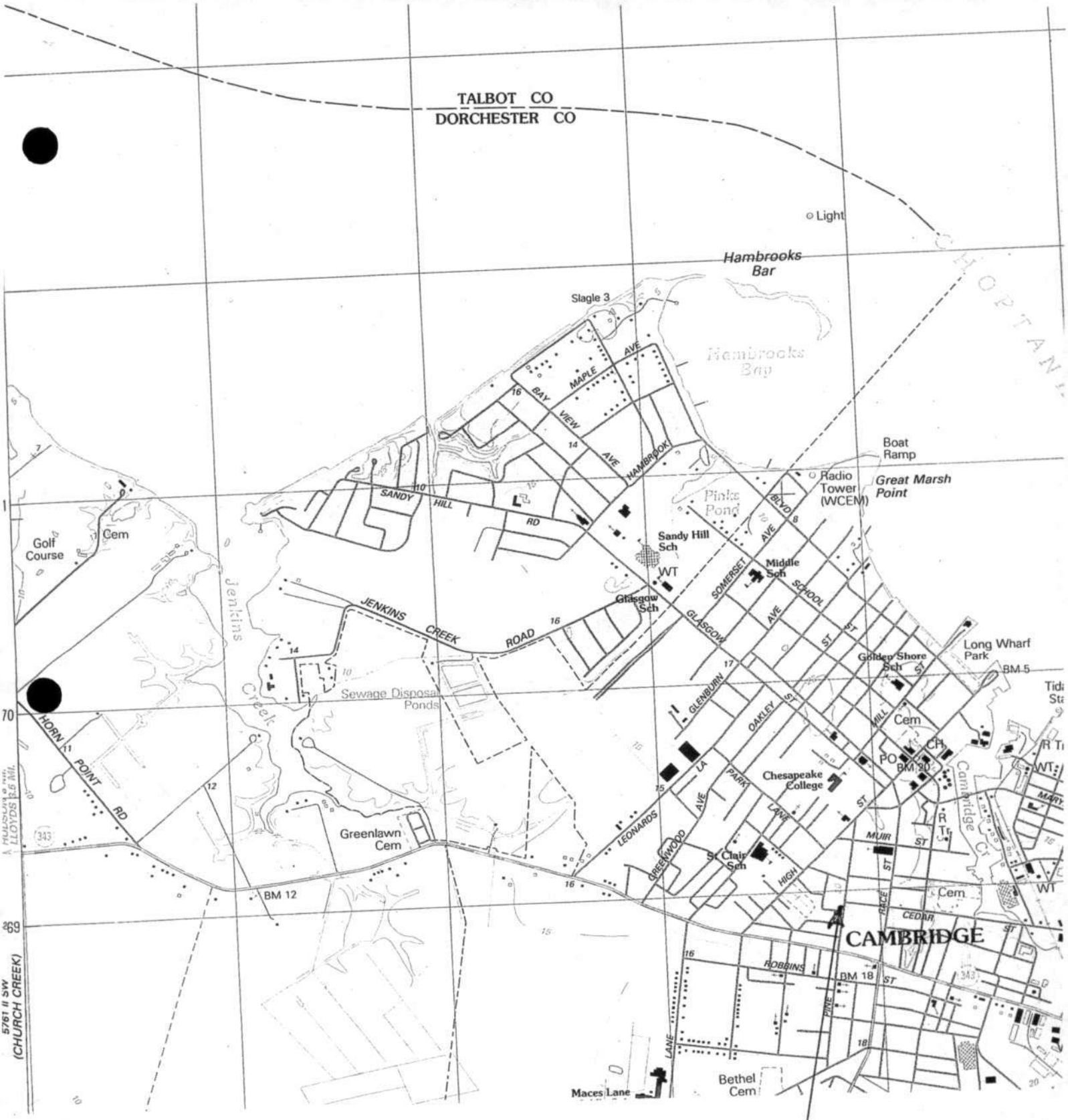
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-591

Name Bethel A. M. E. Church
Continuation Sheet

Number 9 Page 4

D-591, Bethel A.M.E. Church
Sanborn Insurance Map, 1918

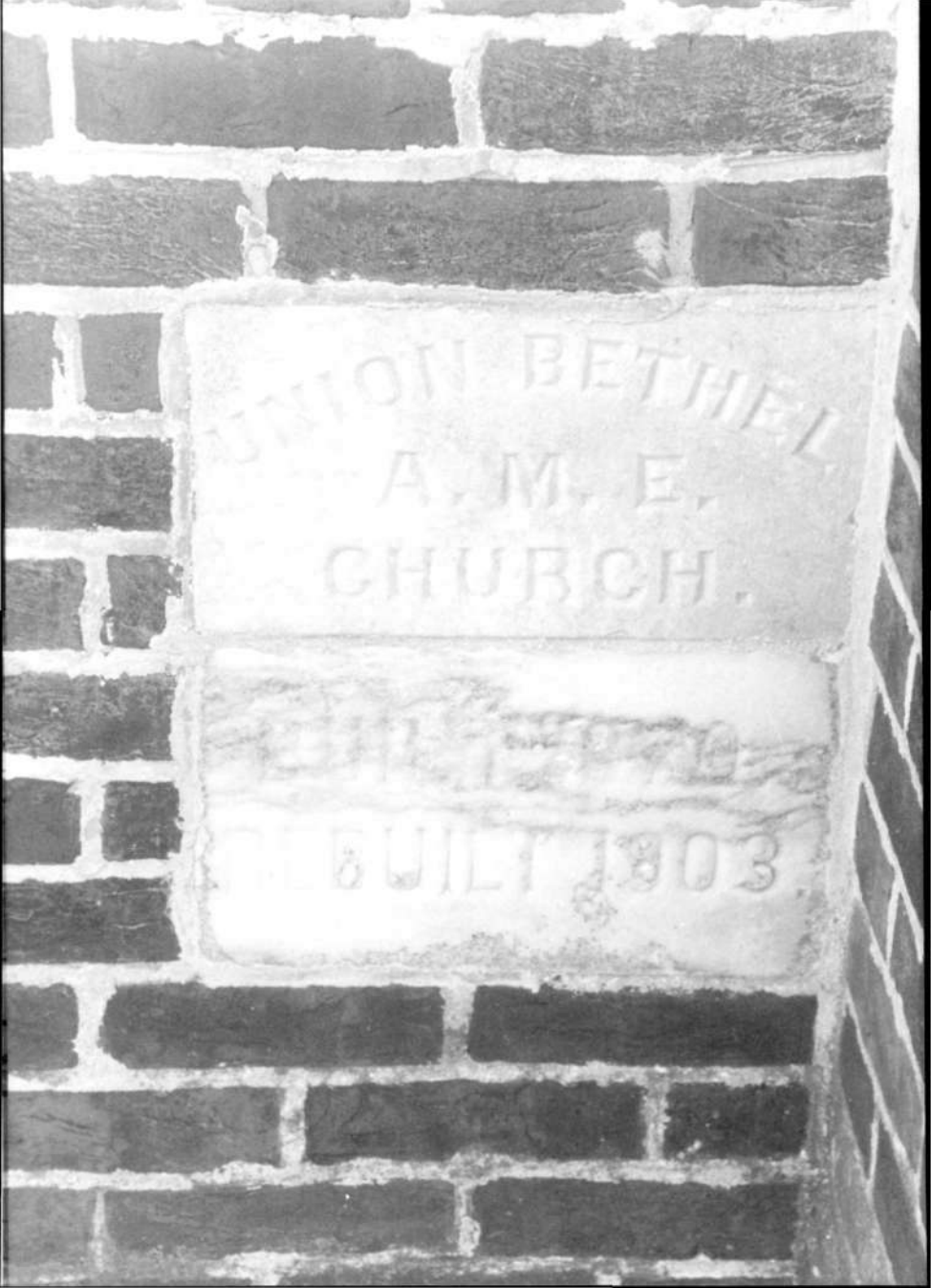


D-591, Bethel A.M.E. Church
Cambridge, Maryland Quadrangle

DO NOT
ENTER

D-591
BETHEL A. M. E. CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE, DORCHESTER CO. MD.
SOUTHEAST ELEVATION
2.2010, PAUL B. TOWNS, PHOTO.
MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

1 of 2


UNION BETHEL
A. M. E.
CHURCH.
BUILT 1903

D-591

BETHEL A. M. E. CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE, DORCHESTER
CO., MD.

2. 2010, PAUL B. TOMANT,
PHOTO.

NEC/MD. HIST. TRUST

2 of 2

Dorchester - 591
Bethel AME Church
Cr. of Pine & Bethel Sts.
Cambridge,MD,21613 1870, 1903

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.

D - 591

MAGI#1005914708

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

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: First

STATE: Maryland

COUNTY: Cambridge

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
X STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
X SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	X RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__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

STATE, zip code: MD, 21613

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Dorchester Co. Court House

Liber #: WJ 4

Folio #: 36

STREET & NUMBER:

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:

D-591

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE 1870-1903
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

D-591

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	X RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	X SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1870-1903 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

D-591

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

ORGANIZATION DATE

STREET & NUMBER TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN STATE

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory 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
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

D-591

CAMBRIDGE

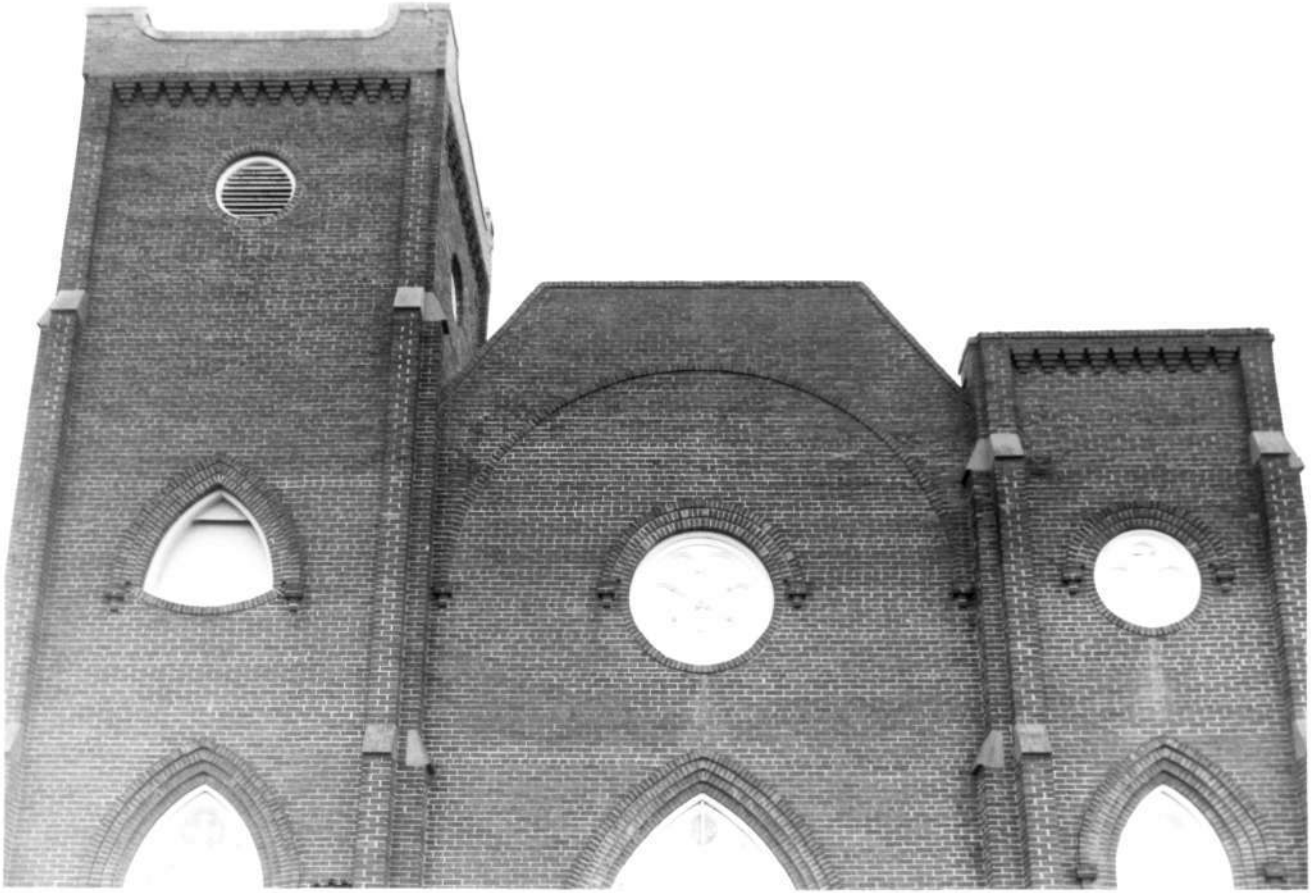
DO NOT
ENTER
BETHEL

591

47%

Bethel A.M.E. Church D-591
Cambridge, Dorchester County, MD
Michael Hosford

Maryland Historical Trust, Annapoli
Southeast elevation
2/81



Bethel A.M.E. Church D-591
Cambridge, Dorchester County, MD
Michael Hosford

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

BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

Bethel A.M.E. Church D-591
Cambridge, Dorchester County, MD
Micheal Hosford

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