

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery

Other names/site number: DHR# 089-0360

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 135 Chapel Green Road

City or town: Fredericksburg State: VA County: Stafford

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A B C x D

<p>Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>Title :</p>	<p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY: cemetery

RELIGION: religious facility: church

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19th CENTURY AND 20th CENTURY REVIVALS: Late Gothic Revival

OTHER

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STUCCO; METAL; BRICK;

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery is an African American cemetery in Stafford County, Virginia. The cemetery was started shortly after the Civil War. It is well maintained and contains sixty (60) marked graves, a small number consisting with only a simple rock for a headstone, and approximately one hundred (100) unmarked visible grave shafts. Contributing secondary resources include Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church and the site of an earlier 1870 church. The cemetery possesses historic integrity related to its association with the desire of newly freed slaves and free blacks to embrace their own ethnic and racial identity in funerary aspects. The church possesses historic integrity by association with the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The site of the 1870 church possesses historic integrity related to its information potential as an archaeological site.

Narrative Description

Location and Setting

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery is located in a serene pastoral setting of tall mature oak trees and green space in a back country rural area of Stafford County, Virginia. Woodlands and farms dominate the surrounding landscape while the remoteness of this area of Stafford County presses the adjacent line of King George County, lying approximately one mile to the east. The church and cemetery are north of Chapel Green Road which passing in front

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mimics that of a once ancient trail. Vehicle access is from Chapel Green Road. Spaces for parking flank both sides of the sanctuary with paved asphalt, including spaces reserved for handicap parking. An asphalt drive circles behind the church connecting both parking areas.

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery, Contributing

The Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery is an integral part of the Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church property since the congregation organized in 1868. The earliest interments would be former slaves from Stafford County and more specifically the White Oak area. The vast majority of graves are unmarked while others employ a simple rock. Numerous depressions are clearly visible indicating unmarked grave shafts. The majority of these depressions are located in a distinctive green space just east of the site of an earlier 1870 church (no longer extant). Some depressions are confined so closely as to exhibit a large depression that may indicate a common family burial. In May 2017, an archeological field survey was conducted to locate the site of the earlier 1870 church and four clear unmarked grave shaft depressions were observed within the target area. These were flagged and avoided.

Additionally, in the immediate rear of the church another area of unmarked interments exists with depressions almost unrecognizable. Oral history relates that this area contains unmarked graves. Examination of the area revealed the broken fragment of a marker made of concrete containing only the name "ANDREW. The total number of unmarked graves in both the rear and east of the church is approximately one hundred (100). This number includes grave shafts that are clearly visible and others which are barely discernible. It would be reasonable to consider unmarked graves exist without a visible grave shaft depression.

With the exception of one marked grave dating to the late nineteenth century, marked graves only began to appear with twentieth century interments. These markers are composed of a variety of materials. Examination revealed rock (4), concrete (14), cinder block (2), tin/metal staked plaque (9), granite (26), marble (2), and bronze (3). These culminate in a total of 60 marked graves.

There is complete absence of funerary art and no carved decorations exist on markers with one exception, this being the marker of "Mamie L. Morton April 14, 1878 Jan. 26, 1926 At Rest;" it is a granite marker with an arched top, adorned with a crown and cross flanked by ivy. The bottom of the marker contains a poem:

In the grave softly sleeping
Where the flowers gently wave,
Lies the one we love so dearly,
In the silently, lonely grave.

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Markers composed of concrete usually have a flat top with a smaller number having an arched top. Granite markers are predominately flat on grade or slightly slanted and being modern may contain decoration mechanically created.

There is a prominent absence of epitaph. Along with name, the marker usually possesses date of birth and death only. As an exception some may include for example; "Beloved Mother," "Forever in our Hearts," "Trusting in God." Two examples of markers were found with name only omitting the dates of birth and death. The cemetery containing markers which are generally simplistic and lacking embellishment reflect the nature of an African American rural church congregation with economic constraints.

Military burials exist with six (6) marked as such. In May 1983, the Quantico National Cemetery opened on the Quantico Marine Corp Base adjoining northern Stafford County. It may be noted that veterans who were members of Bethlehem Church opted for interment in Quantico where they would receive military fanfare and honors.

In 1951, a new church was built and subsequent interments of marked graves demonstrate a pattern of migrating to the northeast side and rear of this new edifice. The cemetery is maintained in the Christian tradition of graves facing eastward. Marked interments, beginning in 1887, continued to as recent as 2014. In the absence of funerary art, some more recent graves, eight (8) in number, have been enclosed with low fencing or a brick border containing small ornamentation or figurines such as little plastic angels, creating the sense of a funerary shrine with objects colorful and always neatly placed in remembrance of the departed loved one. Interestingly, this practice does not create an altar as associated with Catholicism or Eastern religions, rather an overall shrine encompassing the borders of the grave site. Where this distinctive funerary shrine is observed it is well maintained and demonstrates an artistic sense of reverence.

The cemetery is in good condition. No formal record exists for interments and no survey has been conducted. The following names of interred individuals are among those graves that are marked. It can be ascertained that interments include those born prior to the Civil War, although it is not known if any of these individuals were enslaved. The cemetery also contains the graves of veterans of military service.

ELDER JOHN T. BROWN

Born 1854, Died 1945

In God He Trusted

Additional Information: 3rd Pastor of Bethlehem 1911-1936. Born during slavery.

GORDON WHITE, SR.

Born 1859, Died 1929

Additional Information: Born during slavery.

MARY SCOTT

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Born Oct 4, 1870 Died Jan 19, 1887

MAMIE L. MORTON
April 14, 1878 Jan. 26, 1926
At Rest (followed by a poem)

ELDER ROLAND L. PRESTON
Dec 12, 1936 Dec 27, 2012
Loving Pastor, Husband, Father, Grandfather
Additional Information: 7th Pastor of Bethlehem 1986-2012.

RODNEY PRESTON
1958-1981
Additional Information: Rev. Preston's Son.

SIERRA BERNICE TIBBS
Jan 20, 1997 Feb 7, 2006
Our Beloved Singing Angel
Additional Information: Rev. Preston's Granddaughter.

KATHLEEN L. GREENHOW
July 27, 1964 June 20, 2012
In Loving Memory, Wife, Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend
Additional Information: Rev. Preston's Daughter

SEAN KENYATTA EPPS
OCT 24, 1976 Jan 28, 2009
23rd Psalm (reference only, the Psalm is not written out)

JACK DANGERFIELD
1916-1999

MARIEDA W. MILLS
1924-1994
Beloved Mother of James S. Wade, Jr.

RODERICK CARTER
1974-1990
Additional Information: He drowned in the Rappahannock River.

BERNARD STEWART
1904-1985
Uncle Buck

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ALICE M. STEWART
Dec 23, 1923 Apr 22, 2000
Forever in our Hearts

ROBENER EDWARDS
1908- 1952

HENRY M. EDWARDS, U.S. Army, WW II
May 18, 1918 April 14, 1987
Additional Information: Veteran

LLOYD D. EDWARDS SP5
86 Engineering BTN, Korea
April 12, 1930 Dec 28, 1959
Additional Information: Veteran

JOSEPH EDWARDS 'JON'
Jan 1872 Dec 24, 1953

ADELINE EDWARDS
Aug 17, 1882 Sept 4, 1963

LEROY GOLDEN
Died June 30, 1947
Trust in God

JOSEPH J. EDWARDS
3 Feb 1924 29 Mar 1941

MARY L. WHITE
Jul 8, 1929 Dec 1, 2014

LUCY BEELLE CONWAY
Jan 27, 1925 Jan 27, 2007
A Loving Mother

MITCHEL CONWAY
9/26/1918 - 9/22/1968

R. ANNA WILLIAMS
1899 - 1969

EDDIE WILLIAMS
1921 - 1961

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JOSEPHINE WHITING LEWIS

May 14, 1903 June 10, 1997

Mama, We Love You

SARAH E. HOWELL

Dec 20, 1914 Oct 28, 2005

In God's Care

JOHN A. WHITE, SR.

1893 – 1975

HOWARD M. WHITE

Enl. Aug 3, 1918, Disc. July 1, 1919

Born Jan 30, 1898 Died June 30, 1953

Additional Information: Veteran

MAMIE SIMMS

1898 – 1976

DAISY PRESTON

1906 – 1987

WILLIAM S. WHITE, SR.

Pvt. U.S. Army WW I

1889 – 1977

Additional Information: Veteran

MARY WHITE

July 4, 1904 Oct 4, 1994

BETTIE L. STEWART

April 7, 1879 May 19, 1969

At Rest

WILLIAM WHITE, JR. PFC, U.S. ARMY, WW II

Feb 17, 1923 Jan 18, 1965

Additional Information: Veteran

GORDON WHITE, JR.

1892 – 1964

LUCY WHITE

1892 – 1964

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TAYTOR CONWAY

7-1-1955 TO 8-10-1955

Additional Information: The spelling of Taytor is as appears. A parent's joy and sorrow in little over a month. Son of Mitchel and Lucy Belle Conway.

MARGIE M. STREETS

1941 – 2002

Always in our Hearts

JAMES MCKENNY

Nov 11, 1935 Oct 21, 1995

MAMIE MCKENNY THOMPSON

1907 – 1993

ASHTON B. MCKENNY

No dates

ALLIE MCKENNY

No dates

JAMES L. WHITE

March 8, 1973 Feb 8, 1986

With God Now

Additional Information: Died in automobile accident. Grandson of James Louis White.

JAMES LOUIS WHITE

Pvt. U.S. Army, WW II

Mar 27, 1927 Oct 19, 2003

Our Beloved Big Daddy

Additional Information: Veteran

Six (6) grave markers were unreadable due to faded writing.

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church, Contributing

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church was built in 1951. It was constructed in the style of a rural Gothic Revival church of the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. The simple design reflects economy of construction for a small African American congregation during the pre-Civil Rights era. The building consists of a one-story sanctuary with a steeply pitched roof. Each side has four bays. On each side three stained glass windows are distinguishing features especially in the absence of a belfry. The fourth bay is a simple double hung six-over-six wooden window that provides light to the interior nave. At the basement level

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there are two modern double light sliding windows. The front façade gable end was originally built with a wood frame with a porch. It was later enclosed in brick with brick steps leading directly into the sanctuary and having no narthex. This brick enclosure and steps have been replaced by a more recent addition creating a foyer with side entrances. One side entrance accommodates the handicapped and elderly access by an elevator. The opposite side entrance contains stairs to either the sanctuary or the fellowship hall in the basement. Both of these side entrances are adorned with a gable dormer incorporated into a steeply pitched roof extension of the original sanctuary roof line. Atop each dormer is a cross.

The main church built in 1951 replaced an earlier 1870 frame church building. It is cinder block covered in stucco measuring 56' X 39' 6." A bronze metal plaque set in the exterior wall reads:

Bethlehem P. Baptist Church
1st Org. 1870 Rebuilt 1951
Elder H. B. Williams, Pastor

The six stained-glass windows were originally salvaged elements from a 1950 renovation of Fredericksburg Baptist Church on Princess Anne Street, City of Fredericksburg. They were purchased by Bethlehem and incorporated into the 1951 structure. The steeply pitched roof is covered in raised seam metal with a modern metal gutter. This metal roof replaced an earlier metal roof. Present are old snow guards possibly salvaged from the original roof. A square brick chimney penetrates the roof. A basement extending above grade accommodates the fellowship hall. When the sanctuary was built in 1951, there were no restroom facilities.

An addition was added on the rear gable end, replacing wooden steps which provided an exterior access to the pastor's office and choir loft. The addition, also built of cinder block covered in stucco to match the original sanctuary, has a low hip roof covered with asphalt shingles and an attic fan. The addition measures 22' 10 ½" X 45' 7" and is inset with an exterior bronze metal plaque:

Annex 1976
Elder Sulva Warner
Pastor

The length of the addition being greater than the width of the main sanctuary creates an ell on both sides. Both ells accommodate exterior entrances to the extended basement, which contains restrooms, a vestibule, and a storage closet. The rear of the addition is three bays featuring six-over-six double hung windows. Underneath are two basement windows with double lights that slide horizontally. Above this addition the original 1951 rear gable end is covered in asbestos siding.

The church front is a modern addition with a façade of brick, with a large center window of stained glass, and a steeply pitched gable roof covered in metal. The front gable above the brick is covered in raised seam metal mimicking the roof; however, the seams are angled creating a

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decorative slanted “V” pattern. The bricks below are also decorative. Upon eleven courses of American bond above grade, sits a soldier course followed above by a single course recessed with five courses of American bond above it. This is repeated five times to a recessed course with seven courses of American bond above. Another final recessed course is adorned by a soldier course. On the right side of the brick façade in large white lettering is “Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church.” The addition, built in 2008, measures 48’ 9 ½” X 14’ 9” with a front concrete sidewalk.

The interior of the sanctuary has a low partially vaulted ceiling with suspended lighting. These are replacement fixtures. The floor is carpeted, probably covering the original wood floors. The oak pews are post 1951 and were padded later with upholstered material. The nave contains a center section for the choir and Baptismal pool. The left side has a small pastor’s office and seating for deacons and choir. The right side has a choir room and stage area for musical instruments. The nave also contains an old “pastor’s bench” with a matching chair. Both are from the original 1870 “old church.” The foyer, sanctuary, and basement can be accessed by a modern interior elevator with three stops, making the building fully ADA accessible. The basement floor is concrete. Walls are covered in modern thin wood paneling painted white over cinderblock. The ceiling contains exposed ductwork. Present is a full kitchen with cabinets, a furnace room, and storage closets. The main floor area of the basement is set with tables and chairs for fellowship meals and church functions. Restroom facilities are located in the rear. In the basement are three wood primitive pews original to the 1870 church.

Along with the main sanctuary as built in 1951 were a well and pump house of the same construction date. The well is concrete curb lined with a concrete top cover. The pump house nearby is a 6’ 4” square cinder block one-bay structure painted white, with a low pitch roof covered in asphalt shingles. A plywood door provides access. The pump was later placed inside the well and the structure’s current use is for storage. An electrical meter and panel are located on the exterior of the church. Outside are HVAC units, an oil tank for furnace heating, and a utility pole.

1870 Church Site, Contributing

In May of 2017 physical evidence of the location of the original Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church was discovered. Archaeological fieldwork was conducted by a professional archeologist, Brian Schools, with assistance from local historians Frank White and Norman Schools, who provided the background research and materials to guide the field survey. Prior to this investigation, no physical evidence of the original church site was known to remain. According to local historians and church members, and as represented in historic topographical maps, the original 1870 church building was located just to the east of the current church building. Archaeological field survey was confined to this vicinity with the direct objective to locate any physical evidence of the 1870 church building, as well as any contemporaneous features. During the survey one archaeological feature (Feature 1) was located, as well as a group of four unmarked burials. Methods of recovery and explanation are described below.

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Field Survey

The field survey began by visually inspecting the target area east of the current church for any visible signs of the 1870 church site on the landscape. The area immediately east of the current church building and parking lot was a low cut grass covered field that is currently maintained by the church, and provided excellent visibility for observing any physical evidence that existed on the landscape. Approximately 200' east of the current church building and 60' north of Chapel Green Road, four clear unmarked grave shaft depressions were observed within the vicinity of a single headstone belonging to Mamie L. Morton, 1878-1926. According to historian Frank White, there are other known unmarked graves in relation to the cemetery and church grounds. The four grave shafts that were observed during this effort within the target area were marked with flagging, and avoided during any further efforts to locate evidence of the 1870 church structure. No other physical evidence was initially observed on the landscape in the target area. A research plan to excavate judgmental shovel tests across the area had been initiated when Johnnie White, an 87-year-old church member, visited the site. He informed the field crew that he had helped tear down the original church and knew almost exactly where it had stood. He then stood at the spot and insisted that this was the location, where a single cobble could be seen just barely visible through the topsoil and grass cover. Careful troweling of the vicinity of the partially exposed cobble soon exposed brick and other stones, which was then assigned the name Feature 1 for recording purposes. Efforts to further define Feature 1 are described below.

Feature 1

Located roughly 150' from the current church building and 60' from the north edge of Chapel Green Road, Feature 1 was targeted for further investigation to define its limits vertically and horizontally on the landscape. A 4' x 4' area around Feature 1 was chosen for excavation in an effort to remove enough of the surrounding topsoil to expose what appeared to be an architectural feature lying just below the ground surface. Soils surrounding Feature 1 were carefully removed and trowel sorted for artifacts, with a total depth of 1 to 2 inches of soil removed across the surface. All soils were of the same consistency, labeled Stratum I. Stratum I is a topsoil layer of 10yr3/3 silty clay loam, with a slight mixture of 10yr6/6 silty clay. During excavation three brick fragments, two cut nails, and three window glass fragments were recovered. Upon completion of the removal of topsoil, Feature 1 appears to be an "L" shaped architectural footing for the corner of a building foundation, measuring roughly 3' long by 1' wide.

After soils had been removed and artifacts collected, the surface of Feature 1 was cleaned for a detailed recording that included measurements and observations of materials used during construction. Photos were taken and a detailed plan view was drawn. Two types of handmade brick are evident, as well as three types of stone including cobble, sandstone, and possible aquia stone. An indeterminate style of mortar was used to bond the different types of stone and brick, and is evident throughout portions of the feature. No builder's trench was observed adjacent to the feature, although soils are slightly more mixed with clay in the interior of the footing than to the exterior. Although the building materials appear to be of many types and dimensions, either whole, broken, or possibly salvaged, the dimensions of the footing are level and proportionate,

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indicating skilled labor during construction. A photo provided by historian Frank White depicts the 1870 church building, where a similar style and dimension of footing is depicted.

The similarities in the provided photo along with the contemporaneous artifacts recovered from Stratum I likely indicate that Feature 1 represents the southeast corner footing of the 1870 church building. Once the southeast corner of the building was established, projections were made on the estimated location of the other three corners, and in these areas small concentrations of brick and stone appear to exist just below the surface, indicating that more of the foundation footings likely remain archaeologically. While the wood frame structure appears to have been set atop brick and stone footings, it is possible that root cellars or other sub-floor components could exist within the building imprint, as well as related privies or wells outside the structure, when taking into account the preserved sub-surface integrity of the footing represented in Feature 1.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: African American

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHAEOLOGY – Historic – Non-Aboriginal

Period of Significance

1870-1967

Significant Dates

1870

1951

1960

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

African American

Architect/Builder

Smith, Charles

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

In 1870, Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church and its cemetery were created under the auspices of the benevolent organization, the Union Branch of the True Vine. The organization itself was established shortly after the Civil War. The cemetery along with the church and with the site of the old 1870 church are locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic History: African American. The church and related 1870 church site are eligible under Criteria Consideration A due to their historical importance as they relate to the history and development of the local African American community after the Civil War and through the Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights eras. The property also is significant under Criterion D in the area of Archaeology – Historic – Non-Aboriginal because the 1870 church site has potential to yield information important to the understanding of the White Oak area’s African American community, particularly during the Reconstruction era through the mid-20th century. The property meets Criteria Consideration D due to its age, its design features, and its association with historic events. The 1870 church site is eligible under Criterion Consideration D due to its potential to contain a significant underrepresented dataset archeologically, that of a newly freed African American community. The period of significance begins in 1870 with the establishment and construction of the first church building and the cemetery and continues to 1967, encompassing the construction of the new church in 1951 and ending with the traditional 50-year cutoff for properties where significant activities have continued into the more recent past. The church was founded by former enslaved individuals who were assisted by the Freedmen’s Bureau. The original 1870 church building no longer stands, having been replaced by the present church building in 1951. This latter church building was the scene of the organization of the Stafford County Branch of the NAACP and in 1960, meetings were held with Civil Rights lawyers to integrate Stafford’s all-white schools. These first meetings of their kind in the Fredericksburg area and the unsuccessful integration attempts led by student members of the Bethlehem congregation led to a U.S. court ruling resulting in school integration in the Fredericksburg area. Starting in 1870, Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery represents a turning point in social history whereby African Americans could now be buried in their own cemetery with funerals officiated by their own black pastor, and not by a white pastor as law had dictated prior to the Civil War.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church is one of the earliest African American churches established in Stafford County, Virginia. The membership began to meet as early as 1868, comprised of free blacks and former slaves who separated themselves from White Oak Primitive Baptist Church in Stafford County, to organize a church of their own. The following statement is recorded in the February 1868 White Oak Primitive Baptist Church Minutes: “Resumed regular meetings, resolved to dismiss Colored members who desire separate organization.” Again, in May 1868,

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White Oak Primitive Baptist Church Minutes: “The Colored members who desire separate organization should be dismissed from this church. Of this group fifty-nine members moved to Alexandria and Washington City and chose Fielding Robinson as preacher. York Johnson was chosen as preacher for the twenty-seven members who constituted Bethlehem Church for Colored in Stafford County.”

A benevolent organization named “The Union Branch of the True Vine” was started by Rev. York Johnson, with the assistance of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and is still in existence today. The Union Branch organization helped free blacks and former slaves to survive during those difficult times after the Civil War, by assisting them in their everyday livelihood and providing both adults and children the opportunity to learn how to read and write. The name York Johnson was listed by the Freedman’s Bureau as a “prominent citizen” living in Stafford County.

In 1939, Elder Harry B. Williams became pastor of Bethlehem. Rev. Williams was an inspirational leader and motivator, in both civil and religious endeavors. Under Rev. Williams’ leadership the congregation grew, the church got its first piano, and in 1951, a new modern church was built on the same property as the original church, which was torn down. In many African American Baptist churches, the pastor has the final say as to what will or will not take place in that facility. Bethlehem, under the guidance of Rev. Williams, also became active in the Stafford County Civil Rights and school desegregation movements, at a time when pastors of other Stafford County churches were hesitant to get their churches involved for fear of possible damage or destruction of their church or church property.

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church is associated with important events and themes of the African American Civil Rights Movement in the 20th Century as outlined in “Civil Rights in America, A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites.”

The May 17, 1954, United States Supreme Court ruling, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, provided an opportunity for Rev. Williams and the members of Bethlehem to become involved in the Stafford County school desegregation and Civil Rights Movement. In 1956, the Stafford Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began in Bethlehem with a Bethlehem member selected as its first president. Additionally, in 1956, a Bethlehem member graduating from Walker Grant High School in Fredericksburg, Virginia, applied to be a commuter student at the then Mary Washington College (now University of Mary Washington) in Fredericksburg. As the first African American to apply to attend Mary Washington College, she was turned down because of her race.

In April 1960, Rev. Williams gave permission for NAACP State of Virginia Legal Defense Team lawyers from the Richmond law firm of Tucker, Hill, and Marsh, to meet with Stafford County parents and students at Bethlehem to develop strategies to attempt the integration of Stafford County public schools. The NAACP lawyers met at least twice at Bethlehem with various parents and students to discuss legal ways to deal with the Virginia Pupil Placement Law. As a result, Federal Judge Oren R. Lewis of the U.S. District Court in Alexandria required the Stafford County School Board to adopt a three-step plan for integration.

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In August 1960, the high school student who led four other students up to Stafford High School in an unsuccessful attempt to integrate the school was a member of Bethlehem. Two years later when Stafford High School was integrated under pressure from the U.S. District Court, the first student who walked through the door was a female member of Bethlehem. When the African American students arrived at Stafford High School and were hesitant to get out the vehicle and leave their seats, the young female student got up and the other students followed her. As a result of the initial first steps to have their own congregation in 1868, and of the initial first step Civil Rights meetings at Bethlehem Church; in 1962, the church members' work meant that Stafford County began to comply with the integration of its public schools.

The contribution and importance of Bethlehem Baptist Church to the religious community of Stafford County and as an example of a Southern, rural African American church also are important. A small, rural African American church like Bethlehem would not have survived for 148 years by only opening its doors on Sunday morning. In order for a church to survive it must also have in addition to preaching of the gospel on Sunday, some type of community outreach or citizenship activities at various times during the rest of the week.

Bethlehem, founded immediately after the Civil War, not only functioned as a religious institution. It also was at times an educational, civic, benevolent, and quasi-political institution. The Union Branch School was organized to teach adults and children how to read and write, as a result of the fact that it had been against the law to teach slaves to read and write during slavery. Those who were unable to attend school during the week were often able to attend church school on Sundays. There they learned to count and read the Bible or other religious material.

Church members, by acting as deacons, trustees, presidents, secretaries, treasurers and other positions of authority of various church organizations, learned how to conduct meetings, record minutes, and handle money among other things. They held various events to raise money and learned how to use money wisely. These opportunities were not available to them in the outside world. Also on Sunday, farmers, housemaids, sharecroppers, laborers, etc. during the week could heighten their self-esteem by dressing up in their "Sunday go-to-meeting clothes." Men could wear their one suit, Sunday shoes, a necktie, a hat, and women could wear their best dress, hat, shoes and gloves. There was nowhere else they could wear these clothes except to church on Sunday.

To supplement the pastor's meager income, various church members would give him hams, homemade canned goods, and other homemade goods throughout the year. The biggest Sunday of the year at Bethlehem was the first Sunday in September. That was homecoming Sunday. The churchyard would be packed. Relatives who had moved to various locations up north such as Washington D.C., Ohio, Maryland, Pennsylvania, etc., would drive or charter busses to attend. There would be revival services during the week and homecoming culminated with an all-day service on Sunday. Some people would take their annual vacation during that week and come down to stay with relatives. Then on Sunday various families who had spent the majority of the day on Saturday cooking would bring their home cooked meals to the church. They would serve

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their families and relatives from out of town on tables built outside in the yard during the break between the morning and evening services. Folks would have genuine reunions, meeting and greeting folks they had not seen since the previous first Sunday in September.

Actions taken by Bethlehem members over the years have broadened the culture of its members and the community. The Bethlehem Church family has given high school seniors scholarships and provided school supplies to secondary school students. They have worked in the homeless shelter serving meals, and donating financial aid, clothing, and food baskets to the needy throughout the years. Bethlehem Church members have organized various singing groups, performed religious plays at other churches in the area, out of state, and at local correctional institutions. These activities gave members a chance to develop singing and acting talents, perform before the public, and spread the Gospel.

Bethlehem has been a shelter “out of the storm” where members could go to be refreshed by a fiery uplifting sermon, which would allow them to shed the burdens of tribulations and trials of the previous week or month, build up their strength, hold their head high, and “keep on keeping on.” Sometimes members met to talk about some problem they were having in the schools or community and how it could best be handled or resolved. It is no coincidence that the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1950s began in the African American church. The church was the only institution where the key to the building stayed in the hands of African Americans.

Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church possesses historic integrity for its role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The church exhibits Criterion A, Social History: the history of efforts to promote the welfare of society; the history of society and the lifeways of its social groups.

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Prior to the Civil War enslaved individuals were interred in cemeteries located on plantations. This identified an individual as a master’s property in life and in death. Slave cemeteries were dehumanizing. Additionally, free blacks relegated to some remote section of a white cemetery or an isolated spot in the woods had no identity association with their own ethnic house of worship. In the post-Emancipation era, this changed in the area of Stafford County known as White Oak. Encouraged and assisted by the Freedmen’s Bureau, 27 black members of White Oak Primitive Baptist Church sought to separate themselves from the white congregation. Through the creation by White Oak former slaves of a benevolent organization known as The Union Branch of the True Vine, a church was completed in 1870 for the newly organized congregation of Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church. With a congregation and church edifice in place, a church cemetery would intrinsically follow to provide burials in the Christian tradition. The Union Branch of the True Vine provided assistance to families of the deceased with the funeral and burial arrangements.

During the Antebellum years, White Oak Primitive Baptist Church was the only church in the White Oak area of Stafford County. This was a white church; however, blacks were allowed to attend. Enslaved individuals from surrounding plantations would only this one choice to attend a service or had to cross the Rappahannock River into Fredericksburg to attend a service. Plantations that relied

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on and enslaved workforce in neighboring White Oak included Eastwood, Traveler's Rest, Sherwood Forrest, Little Falls, Hollywood, Chatham, Rumford, Ferry Farm, Chapel Green, Albion, and Snowden. Newly freed slaves desired their own house of worship and to be buried in a cemetery of their own collective identity rather than as property discarded by the master and hidden from sight behind the "big house." Charles Emery Stevens, the biographer of Anthony Burns, provides a description of African American burials on a plantation. Stevens obtained his information directly from interviewing Burns. Prior to his escape to Boston, Anthony Burns was an "exhorter" or unofficially ordained black preacher in Falmouth, neighboring the White Oak area. Burns escaped from Falmouth but, upon his discovery in Boston, he was arrested, tried, and forcibly returned to Falmouth as required by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1950.¹

"If a slave died during the week, no funeral was allowed to interrupt the daily toil of the plantation. The body...was deposited in the ground without ceremony or delay, and a few shovelfuls of earth were thrown in, while the bereaved kindred went about their toil as usual. But on the following Sabbath, the whole body of slaves, attended by the master or the overseer, assembled to 'sod the grave.' With prayers, exhortations, and much singing of hymns...this final ceremony was completed. In death, as in life, the social distinctions of slavery are carefully maintained...the dead bodies of slaves never mingle their dust with that of the sovereign race. No monument, inscribed with the name of the deceased, ever marks the spot where he lies, as no legal sanction was ever given his name while he lived. A rough stone, gathered from the wayside, or a branch of cedar, soon to die, is his only monument."

To some plantations owners, their enslaved workforce was of no human value and a deceased slave was simply property to be disposed of as unwanted refuse. In a letter written in response to being excommunicated (for the sin of seeking his freedom by stealing himself from his master) from Falmouth Union Church by the white congregates, Anthony Burns wrote, "You have thrust me out of your church fellowship. So be it. You can do no more. You cannot exclude me from Heaven; you cannot hinder my daily fellowship with God." Prior to Emancipation the "social distinctions of slavery" were indeed carefully maintained. After Emancipation, whites could not deny the desire by African Americans their collective identify to practice their own sacred funerary rites associated with Christian belief in death, burial, and resurrection. Additionally, those African Americans who were former slaves could now embrace the prospect of having their funeral officiated by a black minister instead of a white minister. Before the Civil War, laws forbade blacks from being an ordained minister and blacks were to be ministered by a white pastor.

The marked graves of Elder John Brown 1854-1945 and of Gordon White 1859-1929 in the Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Cemetery, indicate they were born before Emancipation. It is not known if they were born into slavery or were free blacks. The first minister of Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church, Reverend York Johnson, was a former slave and is believed to be buried in the church cemetery. An April 29, 1885, *Fredericksburg Star* newspaper obituary states, "York Johnson, a respected old colored Baptist minister, died at the residence of Jane Taylor, in Stafford County, on the 25th instant, at the advanced age of 88 years. He was widely known and bore a good character. He was once the slave of Dr. Hugh Morson, and had his full confidence. For several years he was in a helpless condition, and was kindly cared for by Jane Taylor and other members of Bethlehem

¹ Earl Maltz, "The Trial of Anthony Burns (1854)." (2017, November 14). In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Burns_Anthony_The_Trial_of_1854.

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church, of which he was pastor.” The traditional relationship between a black pastor and the congregation of a black church is one in which the pastor was considered pastor up until the day he resigned or died. Although Rev. York Johnson’s obituary does not say where he was buried, it does state that he was living with a Bethlehem member, he was pastor of Bethlehem Church, and he was being taken care of by other Bethlehem members. Bethlehem was Rev. York Johnson’s home church, the church that he started. If a pastor died in the vicinity of his home church, and he was pastor of that church, he would be buried in the church cemetery.

There are two known Bethlehem pastors buried at Bethlehem. In addition to Elder John Brown, there is Elder Roland Preston whose tombstone is dated December 12, 1936 – December 2012. Elder Preston was quite sick during his last couple of years at Bethlehem and would often preach sitting down. Sometimes he would drag himself out of the house just to come to church and preach. The last Sunday he appeared at Bethlehem, he fell in the study on his way to come out to preach. The rescue squad took him to the hospital; however, he never came home again. He was considered pastor of Bethlehem up until the day he died. Due to the fact that two former pastors are buried in the Bethlehem church cemetery, there is a reasonable degree of certainty that Rev. York Johnson is also buried in the Bethlehem Church Cemetery.

Given the rural nature of the church, there was no registry of interments. It is believed that ex-slaves from King George County are also buried in the cemetery. Bethlehem Church is in close proximity to King George County and many residents of Stafford married those of King George and they all worshiped at Bethlehem. Some prominent King George names were Conway, White, Johnson, Brown, Taylor, and Walker. The majority of the Stafford/King George members of Bethlehem were kin.

The Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery possesses historic integrity representing Ethnic Heritage: the history of persons having a common ethnic or racial identity.

1870 Church Site

The 1870 church was the first Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church. It was razed in 1953 after the congregation moved into the 1951 building. The old church building having served for 81 years, its vision originated in 1868, with 27 African American members of a white church. These African Americans had no church building to identify with their own ethnicity and desired to separate. This was a bold step as up until that time all institutions were white, created by whites, run by whites, and could be dissolved by whites. The “social distinctions of slavery,” included the church and had been carefully maintained. On the heels of Emancipation an independent all black church would have been a radical new idea to many people in the South during Reconstruction. Such a concept could originate out of a town, city, or where there was a large settlement of blacks living, but was less likely for a black church to originate out of a back-country rural environment such as the White Oak area of Stafford County at this time. Many whites saw the establishment of an all-black church as radical and they viewed such developments with skepticism, and even resentment. To blacks, this was a fearful and dangerous undertaking that could only be overcome by faith.

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As a church and at times used as an African American school, the site relates to newly freed slaves assisted by the Freedmen Bureau who desired their own place of worship and sense of identity. The church provided a refuge from the intense pressures of transitioning from servile social status to personal independence and personal freedom. These African Americans now faced the responsibility for providing for family, care of the sick, and death of departed loved ones. This occurs in the aftermath of an area completely devastated by war, depleted of resources, and amidst the bitter resentment and feelings of a defeated society that once benefited from the subjection of a people now becoming new citizens of a new America. With a long road ahead toward an equal footing with whites, the church played an important first step role in the transition to and journey toward citizenship. It has been said that history is merely the barest outline of what actually took place. What man is and what he becomes is in part due to his heritage. Behind them were ancestors, families, and former lives. The 1870 Church is the story of people, of their love, honor, faith, and suffering; of birth and death, of hunger, thirst, and cold, of loneliness and sorrow. It is an American story of hope. The site relates to the history of a region where its prehistory was that of slavery and Civil War; its history that of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. It laid the foundation upon which a new church edifice would play a future prominent role in the Civil Rights Movement and integration. There are no known similar sites in Stafford County.

Archaeological Significance.

The 1870 Church site is locally significant under Criterion D in the area of Archaeology – Historic – Non-Aboriginal. In May, 2017, a restrained archeological field survey was conducted resulting in locating the 1870 church through physical evidence. The discovery of the southeast corner (Feature 1) yielded two important facts. The site remains undisturbed and intact. Secondly, the diffusion of building material exhibits “make-do,” an old African American saying when times were hard. Older members of the current congregation pleasantly experienced the recollection of their parents and the old folks expressing “make-do.” By viewing the footing and seeing it composed of its assortment of materials that the African American community might have its own church, this brought back the memory of their heritage. Further, the composite of material suggest everyone pitched in including children with little stones gathered in a community endeavor. Considering the use of diffuse materials, the footing was astonishingly level indicating a knowledge and expertise in the building trade. The integrity of the site has the potential to yield important information about human cultural history.

Context

The site of the 1870 church lies in the cultural context of Ethnic Heritage: Black Social History. The site identifies with the region’s history of newly freed slaves and Reconstruction. It relates to what is currently known of the region’s history of the Union Branch of the True Vine, organized following the Civil War with aid from the Freedmen’s Bureau. There are no known similar sites.

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Information Potential

Information may be ascertained regarding the level of skilled workmanship possessed by a people formerly believed unable to create, build, or poses trades, without white supervision. Determining what level of workmanship and trades were obtained by African Americans while enduring slavery also may be discerned, as well as identifying the level of ingenuity in utilizing salvage materials and identifying “make do” and the determination to succeed with what one has.

The site is undisturbed and appears to be intact. The site has not been fully excavated. An Archeological Report, “Archeological Evidence of the 1870 era Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church in Stafford County, Virginia.” was completed in July 2017. The report noted that Feature 1, identified during field survey, seems to correlate temporally and geographically with being the southeast corner footing of the 1870 era Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church. Identification of the location by first-hand accounts, historical photo evidence, and contemporaneous artifacts tie the feature strongly to the context, while the construction of the footing itself represents possible salvaged materials being utilized by builders who were nonetheless skilled in their craft. Intact sub-surface features and diagnostic artifacts, along with materials and workmanship that may relate to an underrepresented data set archaeologically, that of the newly freed African American community in Stafford County, indicate that the site has potential to contain significant new archeological data.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Stafford County Deed Book 25, page 373, Deed dated April 11, 1928, Stafford Court House, Stafford, Virginia.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA; Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Office Files

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 089-0360

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.76

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

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NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Zone: 18 | Easting: 291165.60202601 | Northing: 4241133.5161525 |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery is located within the eastern section and northern apex of a triangular parcel containing 2.76 acres one-half mile from the intersection of White Oak Road State Route 218 and Chapel Green Road State Route 602 in Stafford County. Traveling on Rt. 602, the King George County line is one mile east of the church. The southern boundary of the church parcel, recorded as Parcel Number 107 by Stafford County, is fronted by State Route 602. The eastern boundary abuts the James Garfield Brown Family Cemetery. The western and northern boundaries abut privately owned parcels which are densely wooded. Parcel Number 107 contains the church, well house, two paved parking lots, the cemetery, and site of the earlier 1870 church. The 2.76-acre Plat Reference is Deed Book Number 03, page 414 and Deed Book Number 25, page 373. Records are located at Stafford County Courthouse.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries were selected based on legally recorded boundary lines historically associated with the church property since 1870 and encompass all known associated historic resources as well as the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Frank White, Trustee, Norman Schools, Historian, and Brian Schools,
Archaeologist
organization: Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church
street & number: 135 Chapel Green Rd.
city or town: Fredericksburg state: VA zip code: 22405
e-mail: fmwhit@cox.net
telephone: 540-371-0366
date: 3 October, 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of ____.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.