

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: Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery

Other names/site number: DHR No. 036-5311

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: 6145 Ware Neck Road

City or town: Gloucester State: Virginia County: Gloucester

Not For Publication: n/a Vicinity: n/a

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 X C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ 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>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility
FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility
FUNERARY: cemetery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Folk Victorian

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; CONCRETE; SYNTHETICS: Vinyl;
WOOD: shingle; ASPHALT

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

Union Zion Baptist Church is located within the Ware District of Gloucester County on a 1-acre parcel. Its rural setting is about 3.3 miles from John Clayton Memorial Highway (Rt. 14) on Ware Neck Road. The original church (est. 1867) was built on the same land where Union Zion's cemetery is located, about 1.4 miles away on Pole Bridge Road in the same district. After multiple fires, the congregation moved to the current location to rebuild the church. The 2.5-acre Pole Bridge Cemetery is located near the intersection of Pole Bridge Lane and Gill Lane, at the edge of Belleville Creek. The two parcels comprise the resources historically associated with the Union Zion Baptist Church, within which are two contributing resources, the church building and cemetery site, and one non-contributing resource, a c. 2012 shed.

The frame church was built in 1894 in an eclectic Folk Victorian style using wood and brick. The original pitched roof material is unknown, but the walls remain clapboard sided with a two-tiered mansard roof tower in the front of the church, constructed with hand-hewn wood sawtooth shingles and a spire on top. The original structure measures 30' by 60' and subsequent rear addition measures roughly 54' by 32'. The interior features wood columns supporting a balcony above the sanctuary in the front of the building and wood beadboard ceiling and wainscotting and plaster walls throughout. The property also has a non-contributing small storage shed behind

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the church purchased around 2012, and a two-sided bulletin board in the front of the church grounds. The Union Zion Baptist Church structure has retained its historic integrity over its 130-year history and stands as a fine example of late 19th Century craftsmanship and design with its architectural detailing and Folk Victorian style.

Narrative Description

Union Zion Baptist Church

Union Zion Baptist Church is located in the Ware District of Gloucester County, Virginia. It faces west on a one-acre lot with parking lots on the south and east sides of the church and a driveway on the north, leading to the back of the church.

The frame building is of a rectangular form with a projecting central entrance bay and telescoping bell tower. The steeply pitched front gable asphalt roof is accented by a pediment with heavy cornice and frieze detailing. Gutters are attached at the cornice with downspouts at each wall corner. The building is primarily sheathed in vinyl siding with plain, single cornerboards. Sections of the building are covered in wood sawtooth or shake shingles. A brick foundation is punctuated by concrete infill in several areas. Within the façade's brick foundation, a granite corner stone reads "Rebuilt in 1894" and "Union Zion Baptist Church" on the west elevation, facing the parking lot.

Throughout the main block of the church, the one-over-one windows on the façade and north and south elevations originally featured simple frosted glass surrounded by squares of glass in different colors. This style was similar to the transom window on the front entrance seen today. In 1987, the windows were replaced by mosaic-stained glass, depicting different periods in the life of Jesus Christ. There is a high degree of architectural ornamentation at the frieze, stained glass windows and casings, and in its decorative shingles. Hand-carved "swag-and-bow" detail tops the window casings with a larger scale of the same pattern along the frieze.

The façade contains three bays spaced symmetrically with a central projecting entrance tower. Four brick steps with concrete stoop and metal handrails access the entrance door from the front, a concrete ramp provides access from the south, and three concrete steps lead to the stoop from the north. At the first level, the church vestibule extends roughly 10' x 10' with a one-over-one stained glass central window on each north and south sides. The front double-door is topped by a single-light transom separated by a top rail and transom bar from an original multi-light, multi-color transom window. The upper-most transom is topped by the same carved detail topping the other windows. Above the transom is a framed panel which reads "Union Zion Baptist Church 1867."

The façade tower block rises three telescoping sections, the first one-half-story intersects with the main church building's gable roof. The second section features a mansard roof with hand-hewn sawtooth shingles that match that on the front gable. The mansard roof's prominent kick contrasts that of the front gable, which is more subtle. The frieze and cornice at this second tower

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level matches that of the main church building. The third tower level extends vertically with an exaggerated flared kick at the roof base, contains a central wood vent surrounding the internal bell tower. This level of the tower also contains a carved frieze, but it appears to vary from those on the lower levels and only the swag detail is visible. The final tower level is a pointed shake shingle spire with central pediment infilled with sawtooth shingles, all topped by a metal attachment, possibly a weathervane.

The north and south elevations of the main block are identical, with four evenly spaced one-over-one stained glass windows matching those on the façade. The carved window casing and frieze ornamentation continues on both sides.

Two phases of 20th century additions extend from the east elevation of the main block. In 1959, a dining hall and kitchen wing was attached to the main block, inset a few feet on either side to differentiate the two sections. The north and south elevations of the 1959 wing contain one central stained-glass window with similar window trim to that of the main block, but the windows are smaller in scale.

The 1979 addition connects to the east end of the 1959 addition and is rectangular form oriented perpendicularly to the c. 1894 main block, creating a "T" form in totality. The 1979 wing provided space for restrooms, two choir rooms, an office, and pastor's study. Both frame additions are sheathed in vinyl siding matching the main block. The northwest and southwest entries to the addition are identical and each contains a central screen door topped by a metal awning with brick steps leading to the stoop. The 1979 addition contains pointed Gothic windows in the north kitchen, south pastor's study and restroom that were salvaged from an area church contemporary to the c. 1894 Union Zion building. The Union Zion congregation acquired the church in the 1940s and the windows were removed for use in this building.

From the east parking lot, the progression of the church's physical evolution is clear in the roof pitch variation, ranging from the main block's steep rear gable roof, the c. 1959 addition's low pitch hip roof, to the addition's even lower pitch side gable and shed roofs. The elevation is separated into multiple sections with different rooms extending from the primary 1979 wing. The southernmost section extends out the furthest and has two equally spaced one-over-one wood sash windows. The central section has a five-panel wood door with a mid-wall horizontal window and the section furthest north contains a two-over-two wood sash window, possibly reused from the earlier main block when the first addition went on or from the other church that was dismantled.

Interior

From the façade entrance, the interior of the church measures roughly 30' by 60' with a 10' by 10' vestibule centered on the west facing wall. The vestibule is furnished with two upholstered pine pews facing each other. Behind each pew is a mosaic window. The lower walls of the vestibule are covered in both double- and triple-groove beadboard wainscoting topped by a chair rail while the upper walls are painted gypsum. The doors leading to the sanctuary feature four

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framed horizontal panels each. The top panels are made of lead framed glass with three rows of lead glass circles within.

Upon entering the open sanctuary from the vestibule's double doors, it is an open rectangular plan that stretches lengthwise to the east. Inside the open sanctuary, a 90-degree carpeted staircase is found on both sides of the entrance with thick turned mahogany newel posts, handrails, and painted balusters. The wall of the staircases has simple raised vertical panels. The staircases lead up to a semi-circular balcony and balustrade, which is supported by hand carved mahogany columns. The floor on the north and south sides is cut out to expose the tops of the mosaic windows. Two rows of seating are found on the balcony, with the rear row sitting on top of a raised wooden platform. There is a centered door on the west wall that leads to the first level of the entry tower for access to storage and the church bell.

On the main level of the sanctuary, two carpeted aisles divide three sections of upholstered pine pews facing the altar, pulpit and choir loft. On either side of the altar and pulpit, the sanctuary wraps around with a continuation of the pine floors on which are located an upright piano to the left and drum set to the right. The pulpit contains a hidden baptistry under the carpeted floor. There are three cased openings on the east wall of the sanctuary. Two openings on either side each lead to short hallways. Directly behind the pulpit there is a large, cased opening which features the carpeted choir loft made of three different floor levels. The opening for the choir loft is divided from the pulpit by a knee wall with picture frame panels and a curtain that hangs just above the top of the wall. In the center back of the choir loft is a magnificently illuminated mosaic glass window with a depiction of Jesus Christ on the Mount of Olives. At the bottom of this window are the names of the seventeen founders of the church. On either side of the choir loft the short hallways previously mentioned originally led to the outside of the church. These hallways now provide access to the dining hall that was added in the 1950's.

Within the c. 1894 block, pine flooring blends with carpet in the vestibule, aisles, altar, and pulpit area. The walls are covered with both double- and triple-groove beadboard and a blend of plaster and gypsum board and accented by a chair rail and wainscoting.

The flat ceiling in the sanctuary measures 18' high and is covered by forty-five-degree angled, triple-groove beadboard panels. These panels are inlaid in a simple 4 by 4 framed grid form. The interior intersections of the grid are connected by a bullseye motif. At the intersection closest to the center entry of the sanctuary are smaller beadboard panels running diagonally of the other panels. Crown molding runs along the ceiling on each side of the sanctuary. Three hexagonal lantern lights and two ceiling fans alternate and hang in a row from the center of the ceiling. Additionally, there are two ceiling fans just above the balcony and one above the choir loft. Double wall sconces are located on the north and south walls. These fixtures in the sanctuary are modern.

There are two chimneys that are centrally located on the north and south walls, which were originally for wood-burning stoves, the main heat source when the church was built. The openings for the stove pipes have been since covered over by plaster and the stoves removed.

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Secondary Resource, c. 2012 (Non-Contributing)

A vinyl, front gable storage shed is located on the east side of the Union Zion Baptist Church parcel.

Pole Bridge Cemetery, c. 1867 (Contributing Site)

The Pole Bridge Cemetery is located 1.4 miles away from Union Zion Baptist Church, along State Route 625. The Pole Bridge Cemetery has historically been Union Zion Baptist Church's cemetery and is located on the first parcel of land purchased by the founders of the church in 1867. The cemetery sits in a rural setting along a dirt road and is bounded by Pole Bridge Lane to the southeast, Gill Lane on the northwest, and the remaining sides by trees.

The cemetery is divided into two sections with a short driveway providing access to both. Approximately half of the graves are unmarked, and some have been covered by trees, but there are 234 documented grave markers between the two sections. There are many repeated surnames with some of the most numerous including: Evans, Gardner, Gayle, Griffin, Hudgins, Jones, Lee, Smith, Williams, and Willis. Markers range from standard metal signs, upright etched and/or laser cut markers, flat headstones, tombstones, or more rudimentary etched stone forms. The materials range from fieldstone to granite and marble.

The first section, at the corner of Pole Bridge Lane and Gill Lane, is referred to as the "Old Section". The "Old Section" contains the oldest graves in the cemetery and is believed to have been the location of the first Union Zion church building. The earliest known marker belongs to Deacon Jasper Lee, who was born in 1810 and died on January 11, 1897. Many of the earlier markers belong to individuals born in the early- to mid-19th century, but some markers are illegible or do not have enough identifying information.

On the other side of the driveway, more recent graves are arranged in groups of family burials in an indistinguishable pattern. Most births date from the early- to mid- 20th century and burials continue there presently.

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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
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1867-1894

Significant Dates

1867
1894

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Evans, 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.)

The Union Zion Baptist Church is one of the earliest churches built by a newly freed Black community for Black congregants in Gloucester County. The founding of the church and its original cemetery, the historic Union Zion Cemetery, also known as the Pole Bridge Cemetery, were part of a larger movement during the mid- to late-19th century where church congregations grew independently within communities and created their own spaces for worship and gatherings. Union Zion Baptist Church, along with its mother church, Zion Poplars Baptist Church (DHR#036-5001) developed out of this movement and were connected to a pattern of events relative to the evolution of autonomous Black churches in the South, meeting **Criterion A** in the areas of **Ethnic Heritage: African American** and **Social History**. Under **Criterion C** in the area of **Architecture**, the church stands as a vernacular interpretation of Late Victorian buildings in and around the region and is the work of Gloucester native, Charles Evans, a then-student at Hampton Institute. Criteria Consideration A applies as the church is a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural distinction and historical importance. Criteria Consideration D applies due to the contributing Pole Bridge Cemetery and its association with the development of African American religion in Gloucester County and the Union Zion Baptist Church.

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

Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage: African American and Social History

Religion and African American Churches in 18th and 19th century Virginia

During the period of slavery in the New World, people from different African regions were forcibly brought together with the single purpose of providing free labor for landowners. These Africans were forced into new communities where cultures and customs varied greatly, and practice of religion underwent significant changes when it was introduced into different African belief systems and worship styles. When blended with Christianity practiced by most of the white population in America, a unique style called “slave religion” was born. Thus were the beginnings of what is known as the “Black Church” in the United States.

For many years, Blacks, if allowed to worship, did so with their White masters in a segregated portion of the church. Some slave owners thought religious education could lead to enslaved uprisings or the idea that Blacks were equal to Whites. A few churches, supported by Christian whites opposed to the institution of slavery, were established in Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia in the 1700’s. The majority of Blacks were still denied their own place of worship and refuge from the brutality that they experienced on a daily basis. In Virginia, an 1804 statute of

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the Statutes at Large of Virginia, prohibited slaves from assembling for religious purposes, unless they were attending church with their White masters or with a White family.¹ As a consequence of the 1831 rebellion staged by Nat Turner, a self-styled preacher from Southampton, Virginia, the General Assembly of Virginia legislated acts that prohibited Black or mulatto persons, slave or free, from assembling slaves, in the day or night, for the purpose of giving them religious or educational instruction.²

It is important to note that "the Black Church" typically isn't referencing a building constructed for religious purposes, rather, the term encompassing a people and their religious worldview and practices, many of which are rooted in west African cultural traditions. For example, brush arbors not only served as safe havens for worshippers, but trees, bushes, or vines functioned as sanctuaries for praying, healing, religious sacrifice, and purification.³ In keeping with many west African religions, Blacks' African-derived worldview included a respect for the natural elements, such as trees and bushes, among which spirits were thought to reside. This religious practice of "brush arbor" worship provided Black persons, specifically those enslaved, clandestine religious meeting opportunities in wooded areas, or in remote cabins in wooded areas. Such wooded areas, or thick brush, were often the best places for religious meetings because they offered African-descended peoples a haven for practicing their religious traditions. Throughout the South, prior to the late 19th century, African Americans were prohibited by law from gathering in large numbers to give or receive educational or religious instruction. As such, informal gatherings at the "brush arbor" provided that opportunity.⁴

After the end of the Civil War and abolition of slavery, a period of reconstruction and growth began. Along with this progress came the desire for the newly freed Black people in America a place of their own for education, work and worship. For the first time in American history, the establishment of institutions built by Blacks for Blacks began to take place. The "slave religion" that had been practiced for so long had a new identity aligned with Methodists and Baptists.⁵

¹ A Collection of Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia (Richmond), pp. 20, 120. Contained in the Inventory Of The Church Archives Of Virginia. Prepared by The Historical Records Survey of Virginia. Division of Professional and Service Projects. Works Projects Administration. Sponsored by The Virginia Conservation Commission on Negro Baptist Churches in . Richmond, Virginia. The Historical Records Survey of Virginia (June 1940), iv; Natalie S. Robertson, "Zion Poplars Baptist Church," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999), Section 8.

² John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 174. See also Mechal Sobel Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1979), 9; Natalie S. Robertson, "Zion Poplars Baptist Church," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999), Section 8.

³ Robertson, "Zion Poplars Baptist Church," Section 8.

⁴ Samuel Shepherd, ed., The Statutes at Large of Virginia ... III (1792-1808), 108, 124. Contained in the Inventory Of The Church Archives Of Virginia. Prepared by The Historical Records Survey of Virginia. Division of Professional and Service Projects. Works Projects Administration. Sponsored by The Virginia Conservation Commission on Negro Baptist Churches in Richmond, Virginia. The Historical Records Survey of Virginia (June 1940), xi.

⁵ "Powerful Artifacts: A guide to surveying and documenting rural African American churches," Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, July 2000, pp. 17-18.

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The African American Baptist Church in the Southern United States of America

Among African Americans, the Baptist denomination is one of the oldest and largest in the country, particularly in the southern states. As faith spread throughout the American colonies and sub-denominations surfaced, the Baptist denomination first appeared in the late-seventeenth century south in Charleston, South Carolina, but the first Black Baptist churches developed in the south in the late eighteenth century.⁶ The c. 1758 African Baptist or “Bluestone” Church was the earliest verifiable Baptist church in Virginia, and it was located on William Byrd’s plantation in Mecklenberg. Black churches quickly spread throughout the South, particularly in areas with a greater concentration of free Black, and by 1800, there were over 25,000 Black Baptists documented in the United States.⁷

The Baptist denomination provided the Black population similarities to traditional African worship practices and rituals. During antebellum years, messages of hope and faith through salvation likely resonated with enslaved individuals. The burgeoning Baptist faith took root for African Americans during the Second Great Awakening, out of which the early African American Baptist denomination was cemented as a “faith of both Baptist and African,” one that provided inner strength and a form of self-determination.⁸ Regarding enslavement, the overarching Baptist denomination attempted to remain neutral on the matter, but in 1845, the southern and northern factions split over the issue and southerners formed the Southern Baptist Convention.⁹ After emancipation, African American Baptists broke apart from the White, and formed independent congregations, with an exponential increase of 350,000 congregants in the span of twenty years from 1850 to 1870.¹⁰ By 1893, there were three major regional associations within the African American Baptist Church. The Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States of America was founded in 1880 in Alabama, but its headquarters were in Richmond, Virginia and the organization reached eleven states with an objective of tackling social issues. The second, the American National Baptist Convention, formed in St. Louis in 1886, and its territory covered seventeen states. The third formed in 1893 in Washington, D.C. with a goal of educating and training clergy, titled “The National Baptist Educational Convention of the United States.”¹¹ One year after the formation of the third association, in 1894, Union Zion Baptist Church was constructed as an embodiment of the success of the African American Baptist church in Gloucester, Virginia.

Zion Poplars Baptist Church and the foundation of Union Zion Baptist Church

Prior to the construction of Union Zion Baptist Church, its earliest members were part of Zion Poplars Baptist Church (DHR No. 036-5001), the first documented church for Black congregants

⁶ “Powerful Artifacts: A guide to surveying and documenting rural African American churches,” Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, July 2000, 18.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

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in Gloucester County. Zion Poplars developed as a tradition of meeting under the seven united poplar trees, four of which remain on the church grounds today. Members used the seven poplar trees as a sanctuary for worship, which was an African-inspired cultural tradition that served religious and social purposes.

From the African-Baptist perspective, Mount Zion was the sacred place where God met with his followers. In the case of the Zion Poplars Baptist Church, the seven united poplar trees constituted a form of "Zion" or a sacred place that was reserved for worshipping God; as such, the history of Zion Poplars Baptist Church and its sister church, Union Zion Baptist Church, is rooted in the seven united poplar trees. The founding members of Zion Poplars Baptist Church practiced religion before they had access to a physical church building. Built in 1894, Zion Poplars Baptist Church stands in a rural setting on T.C. Walker Road approximately 6.5 miles from Union Zion and was designed and built by Mr. Frank Braxton, a former enslaved man.¹² Mrs. Rose E. Norton, who was a member of Zion Poplars, and a Hampton Institute graduate, who documented the early history of the church, wrote that, "Blacks would walk long distances to attend Zion Poplars. According to Norton, many of the early congregants walked to Zion Poplars while others reached the church via boat and ferry, which took them across Shell Landing Creek in Ware Neck.

Members of the Zion Poplars Baptist Church living in the Ware District of Gloucester needed and founded a place of worship whose commute did not include traveling through marshes and by boat. Union Zion Baptist Church was established in 1867 by a small congregation of seventeen members. Their initial contributions totaled seventeen dollars, which helped furnish a makeshift structure described as a "shanty."¹³ The structure was destroyed by fire sometime in the 1870's. The members of the church rebuilt the worship space, but this building was also destroyed by fire prior to 1890.

The site that held the earlier two church buildings also included a cemetery historically known as the Union Zion Baptist Church cemetery, also referred to as the Pole Bridge Cemetery, named for its access road. The 1870 deed between Richard S. Folkes of Charles City County and Daniel Gardner, James Tyler, Baily Gardner, "and others" of Gloucester County transferred one acre of land from Folkes for the sum of thirty dollars. The parcel sat between that owned by William B. Taliaferro, James M. Talbot, and W.J. Taliaferro and was sold with a right to "hold or dispose" of the land as church property "for the use or benefit of The Coloured Baptist of Ware Neck, Gloucester County."¹⁴ Taliaferro and Gardner are two surnames listed on markers in the cemetery, but those listed on the deed are either not buried there or do not have markers. While the first church on that site burned, the original cemetery associated with that building and church congregation has remained in use in that location since.

¹² William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 34.

¹³ Charles H. Evans, Untitled article. "S.W." February 1898. Hampton University Archives.

¹⁴ Gloucester County, Virginia, Deed Book 2, page 303, 2/8/1870.

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In 1894, the congregation proceeded to establish a new building on a different parcel of land just over one mile south, on which the church stands today. The second deed that illustrates the evolution of the church from its first to second site dates on June 27th of that year, when the “Trustees of the Union Baptist Church” purchased one acre of land from Lloyd L. and Rachel Thomas for \$25. At the time of purchase, the trustees included “Rev. Williams, Daniel Gardner, and Washington Evans.”¹⁵ Of the trustees listed, there is only a marked burial for a George Washington “Wash” Evans, a Gloucester County native who resided in Ware Neck and was employed as a farmer. Evans died in 1934 at the age of 82.¹⁶ The new parcel was situated between land owned by Lloyd L. Thomas and the Main County Road and was sold “to be held by the said trustees...unto themselves or their successors for ever, for the purpose of erecting thereon a church for divine worship, the said property to be holden under the Laws of Virginia governing church property and under the rules and regulations of Ware Neck Union Zion Baptist Church.”¹⁷ Since the construction of the new building on Ware Neck Road, the cemetery has functioned as an associated site and continued as the church’s burial ground for members, and the church has maintained a strong presence in the community, with some of Union Zion’s current members descended from the original seventeen founders.

Criterion C: Architecture

Architecturally, the church stands as an expression of rural, vernacular Late Victorian design that blends forms and elements from multiple sources. The plan and massing of the building are simple and reflect the one-room, frame church buildings constructed throughout rural eastern Virginia, however, the fine ornamentation at Union Zion stands in contrast to most contemporaneous Black churches in Gloucester County.

While the two earlier Union Zion Baptist Church buildings were ruined by fire, the c. 1894 building was constructed to be a prominent landmark with architectural details primarily carved by hand. Tradition and church records attribute the design of the church to Charles Evans, then-student at Hampton Institute, as such he would have had the professional support of The Freedman’s Bureau at Hampton.¹⁸ The church’s written history states that after Union Zion was destroyed by a fire the second time, the members decided to change the location and the third and present Union Zion was built. “Brother Charlie Evans, a graduate of Hampton Institute, drew

¹⁵ Gloucester County, Virginia, unspecified Deed Book, unknown page, 6/27/1894. Likely Deed Book 18 or 19 based on the Library of Virginia Gloucester County catalog index. All Gloucester County records were destroyed by fire in 1820 and again in 1865. The Union Zion Baptist Church retains handwritten copies of the deeds to the church and cemetery parcels.

¹⁶ “Certificate of Death” for George W. Evans, Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Health, April 7, 1934. Accessed on FindAGrave.

¹⁷ Deed Book, unspecified number, unspecified page, 1894.

¹⁸ The documented reference to Charles Evans is only found in the church history that is presented for the church's anniversary program, last used in the 2008 anniversary program.

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

Gloucester County, VA
County and State

the blueprint for our structure. It is of interest to note that Brother Evans also built the present pulpit stand; however, it has been modified at the base to raise it to a higher level.”¹⁹

Evans, a Gloucester native whose family lived across from the church on Ware Neck Road, graduated from Hampton in 1896 and taught “manual training” in the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Greensboro, North Carolina.²⁰ There, Evans founded and taught a wood-working course that was offered four times a week for two hours each day – a skill that was employed in the hand-carved decorative ornamentation at Union Zion. Over time, Evans incorporated specialty education in joinery, wood turning, wood chipping and filing, machine work, and practical construction. During his time in North Carolina, Evans sought to give students the training that “activates the brain and puts into the hand that skill which dignifies and elevates labor.”²¹ In 1899, Evans became an instructor at what was then “the new trade school building” at Tuskegee Institute, historically black land-grant university in Tuskegee, Alabama.²² By December of 1910, Evans was head of the Carpentry Division at the university, which was “one of the busiest divisions of the institute.”²³ Evans maintained his tie to the Baptist faith and served his Tuskegee community as one of the head deacons in the town’s Baptist church, superintendent of the Sunday School program, and trustee of the town public school.

While there is no documented connection between Frank Braxton, the builder of Zion Poplars, and Charles Evans, or other builders of either church, there is a physical resemblance between the two buildings and architectural detail not seen on any other churches of that period in the county. Like Zion Poplars, Union Zion has a classical base form and details, with the addition of many Late Victorian period hallmarks and unusual finishes. Union Zion is a pared down version of Zion Poplars, but also had a much smaller congregation at the time of its construction and a more modest budget. At Union Zion, details such as the telescoping entrance and bell tower with mansard roofs, sawtooth shingles, protruding gables, a frieze decorated with a swag-and-bow motif running the perimeter of the church and tower sections, windows topped by trim and repeated swag-and-bow motif, transom windows, beadboard walls and ceilings, richly colored high gloss newel posts, columns, and railings, and other small hand carved touches demonstrate an aptitude with carpentry that was not often matched at Black churches at the time.

Black Religious Architecture in Gloucester County

In the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System database, there are nineteen churches recorded in Gloucester County, dating from c. 1718 to 1997 with one, Shiloh Baptist Church, with no construction year listed. The earliest three are associated with White congregations and at least two of the three were fine brick Georgian buildings, both listed in the National Register

¹⁹ According to multiple church members, the church anniversary celebration started sometime in the 1940's. Prior to this time and the publication of the church history and attribution to Evans, the association was always part of the oral history.

²⁰ “Items of Interest: Evans, Charles H.” Unknown Source, October 5, 1899. Hampton University archives.

²¹ Evans, Untitled Article, February 1898.

²² “Items of Interest: Evans, Charles H.” Unknown Source, October 5, 1899. Hampton University archives.

²³ Untitled Article. “S.W.” December 1910. Hampton University Archives.

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

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of Historic Places.²⁴ The next documented church dates to 1830 and is also associated with the White population of Gloucester, the Bellamy Methodist Church, which is not listed, but appears to be a simple front gable building. From 1889 through 1900, there were seven churches known to have been built in the county, all of which were Black Baptist churches, including Union Zion and Zion Poplars, both built in 1894. Only one of those Black churches is listed in the registers, Zion Poplars Church.

Most 19th century African American churches on the Middle Peninsula followed the tradition of other eastern regional churches in their rectangular, front-gable form, either frame construction or eventually covered in a 20th century brick veneer with a projecting front bell tower with spire at the top, unadorned, but like Union Zion in form.²⁵ Most have had wings added to the rear, either parallel or perpendicular to the main block. Union Zion stands as an unusual resource in the area, along with its sister church, Zion Poplars, as emblematic of the skill and craftsmanship undertaken by Black builders to create distinct houses of worship to which their neighbors and families would belong. Both churches display an elaboration of architectural detail of which the others do not possess. While most of the others have material integrity issues, the design and treatment of their steeple towers and spires do not compare to those at Union Zion and Zion Poplars. Union Zion stands apart from most of its contemporaries in its unusual combination of more refined details such as its carved swag-and-bow trim and traditional steeple tower with the vernacular blend of shingles, tower details and roof kicks, and interior woodwork and finishes.

²⁴ Ware Episcopal Church, Petsworth Parish Church (site, demolished), and Abingdon Church.

²⁵ Including Bethel Baptist, Smithfield Baptist, First Baptist, Union Zion, and Zion Poplars, at a minimum based on current and documentary images.

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“Inventory Of The Church Archives Of Virginia, Volume II.” The Historical Records Survey of Virginia, Division of Professional and Service Projects, Works Projects Administration. Sponsored by The Virginia Conservation Commission on Negro Baptist Churches in Richmond, Virginia. June 1940. Google Books.

Brown, Audrey and Ericka Hill. 2006. “NPS Ethnography: African American Heritage & Ethnography”. National Park Service. Accessed 02/15/24.
<https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/histcontextsd.htm#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20all%20people,and%20the%20offshore%20Atlantic%20islands.>

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Gloucester County, Virginia. Deed Books.

- Deed Book 2, page 303. February 8, 1870
- Unspecified Deed Book, unspecified page number. June 27, 1894

Gordon, Mary S. and previous church clerks of Union Zion Baptist Church. “History of the Church.”

Hampton University Museum and Archives. Hampton, Virginia.

Hayes, John. “African American Baptists.” New Georgia Encyclopedia. Accessed 02/15/24. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/african-american-baptists/>.

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Montgomery, William E. Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South. 1865-1900. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1993.

“Powerful Artifacts: A guide to surveying and documenting rural African American churches.” Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University. 2000.

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery

Name of Property

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Robertson, Natalie S. "Zion Poplars Baptist Church." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1999.

Sobel, Mechal. Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith. Westport, CT: Greenwood. 1979.

Weisenfeld, Judith. 2015. "American History". Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Accessed 02/16/24. <https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acefore-9780199329175-e-24>.

Virginia's Cultural Resource Information System (VCRIS). The Virginia Department of Historic Resources. <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/>.

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: Union Zion Baptist Church, Gloucester, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): 036-5311

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 3.5

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

Gloucester County, VA
County and State

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.397135 | Longitude: -76.452378 |
| 2. Latitude: 37.402673 | Longitude: -76.442289 |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

The boundary of Union Zion Baptist Church is shown in blue as a polygon shape on the included tax map titled "tax map 6145 Ware Neck Road".

The boundary of Pole Bridge Cemetery is shown in blue as a polygon shape on the included tax map titled "tax map Pole Bridge Ln".

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the two parcels encompasses the resources historically associated with the Union Zion Baptist Church. The parcel on which the Union Zion Baptist Church sits contains the third iteration of the building, constructed in 1894, and the Pole Bridge Cemetery parcel contains the graves and burials of church members, as well as the locations of the first and second Union Zion Baptist churches.

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

Gloucester County, VA
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Cori A. Gordon
organization: n/a
street & number: 2403 East Clay Street
city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23223
e-mail: cori7374@hotmail.com
telephone: 804.677.0441
date: 3/1/2024

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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: Union Zion Baptist Church and Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Ware Neck

County: Gloucester

State: Virginia

Photographer: Cori Gordon, Mary Gordon, and Joanna McKnight

Date Photographed: 4/5/21, 7/5/23, 7/7/23, 8/16/24, 8/18/24

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

Gloucester County, VA
County and State

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

1 of 44: Church, as seen from Ware Neck Road, view facing southeast.
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0001

2 of 44: Church, façade, view facing east.
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0002

3 of 44: Church, façade, view facing east.
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0003

4 of 44: Church, façade, tower and spire detail, view facing east
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0004

5 of 44: Church, façade, entry transom and sign, view facing east
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0005

6 of 44: Church, façade, tower and spire, view facing southeast
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0006

7 of 44: Church façade, tower and spire, view facing north
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0007

8 of 44: Church, façade and north elevation, facing SE
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0008

9 of 44: Church, façade and north elevation, facing SE
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0009

10 of 44: Church, east elevation, facing west
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0010

11 of 44: Church, east and south elevations, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0011

12 of 44: Church, south elevation, windows, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0012

13 of 44: Church, façade and south elevation, facing NE
VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0013

14 of 44: Church, façade, facing NE

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

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VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0014

15 of 44: Shed, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0015

16 of 44: Church, interior, vestibule, facing east

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0016

17 of 44: Church, interior, vestibule, facing SE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0017

18 of 44: Church, interior, sanctuary, facing east

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0018

19 of 44: Church, interior, sanctuary, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0019

20 of 44: Church, interior, sanctuary, pulpit and choir loft, facing east

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0020

21 of 44: Church, interior, balcony, facing SW

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0021

22 of 44: Church, interior, balcony, view of sanctuary, pulpit and choir loft, facing SE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0022

23 of 44: Church, interior, balcony, view of sanctuary, pulpit and choir loft, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0023

24 of 44: Church, interior, dining hall, facing south

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0024

25 of 44: Church, interior, kitchen and serving area, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0025

26 of 44: Church, interior, vestibule, facing west

VA_GloucesterCounty_UnionZionBaptistChurch_0026

27 of 44: Cemetery, entrance, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0001

28 of 44: Cemetery, entrance and driveway, facing NE

VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0002

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery

Gloucester County, VA

Name of Property

County and State

- 29 of 44: Cemetery, driveway, facing NE
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0003
- 30 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0004
- 31 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0005
- 32 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0006
- 33 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing west
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0007
- 34 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0008
- 35 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0009
- 36 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NE
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0010
- 37 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0011
- 38 of 44: Cemetery, old section, facing north
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0012
- 39 of 44: Cemetery, old section driveway to new section, facing NE
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0013
- 40 of 44: Cemetery, new section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0014
- 41 of 44: Cemetery, new section, facing west
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0015
- 42 of 44: Cemetery, new section, facing west
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0016
- 43 of 44: Cemetery, new section, facing NW
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0017

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Name of Property

Gloucester County, VA
County and State

44 of 44: Cemetery, new section driveway to old section and exit, facing south
VA_GloucesterCounty_PoleBridgeCemetery_0018

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.


LOCATION MAP

Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311

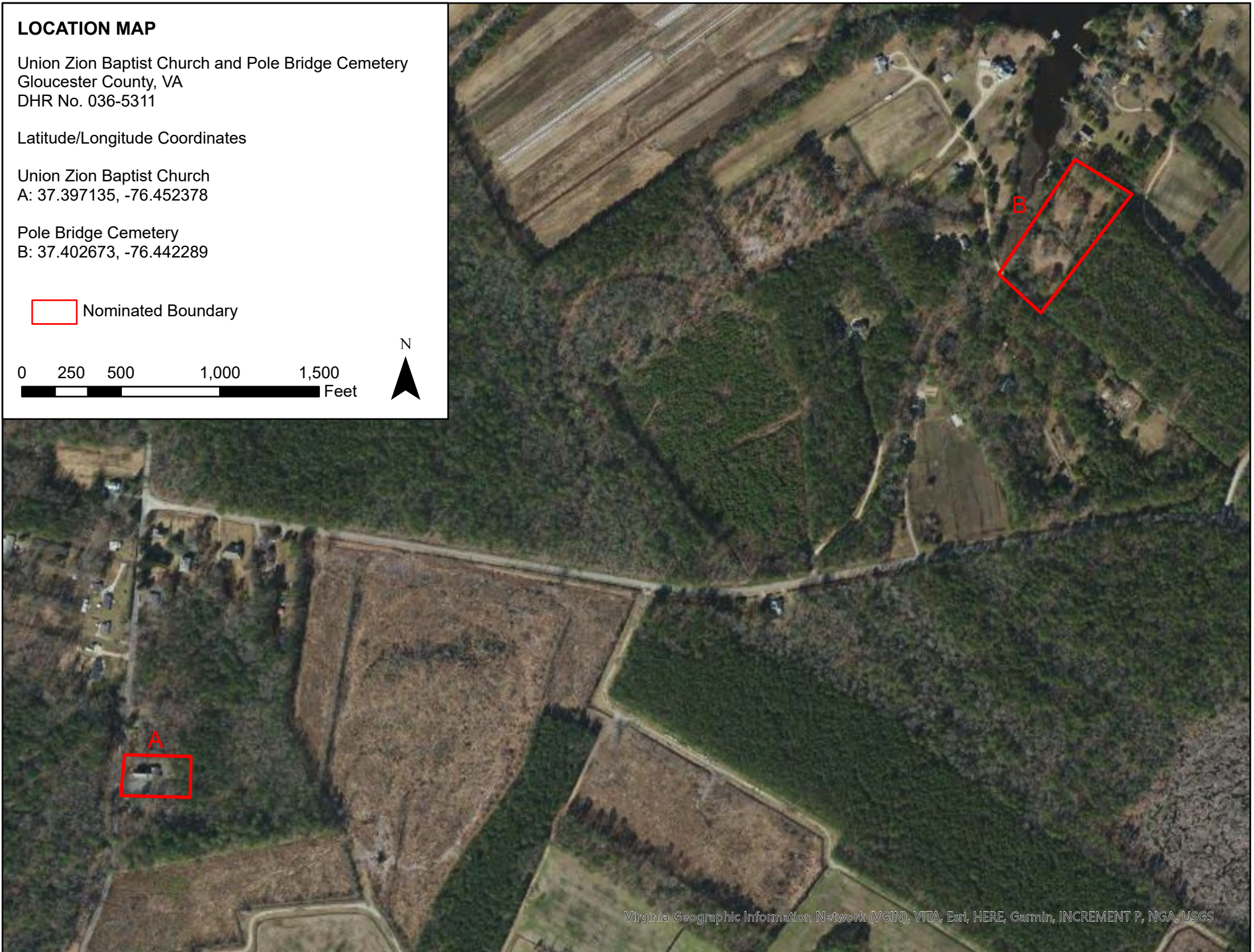
Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Union Zion Baptist Church
A: 37.397135, -76.452378

Pole Bridge Cemetery
B: 37.402673, -76.442289

 Nominated Boundary

0 250 500 1,000 1,500
Feet




LOCATION MAP

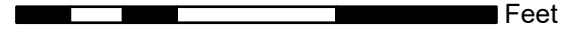
Union Zion Baptist Church and Pole Bridge Cemetery
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Union Zion Baptist Church
A: 37.397135, -76.452378

Pole Bridge Cemetery
B: 37.402673, -76.442289

 Nominated Boundary

0 250 500 1,000 1,500
 Feet




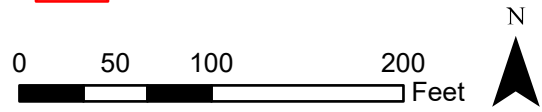
LOCATION MAP

Union Zion Baptist Church
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Union Zion Baptist Church
37.397135, -76.452378

 Nominated Boundary




LOCATION MAP

Union Zion Baptist Church
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Pole Bridge Cemetery
37.402673, -76.442289


 Nominated Boundary


0 100 200 400 Feet

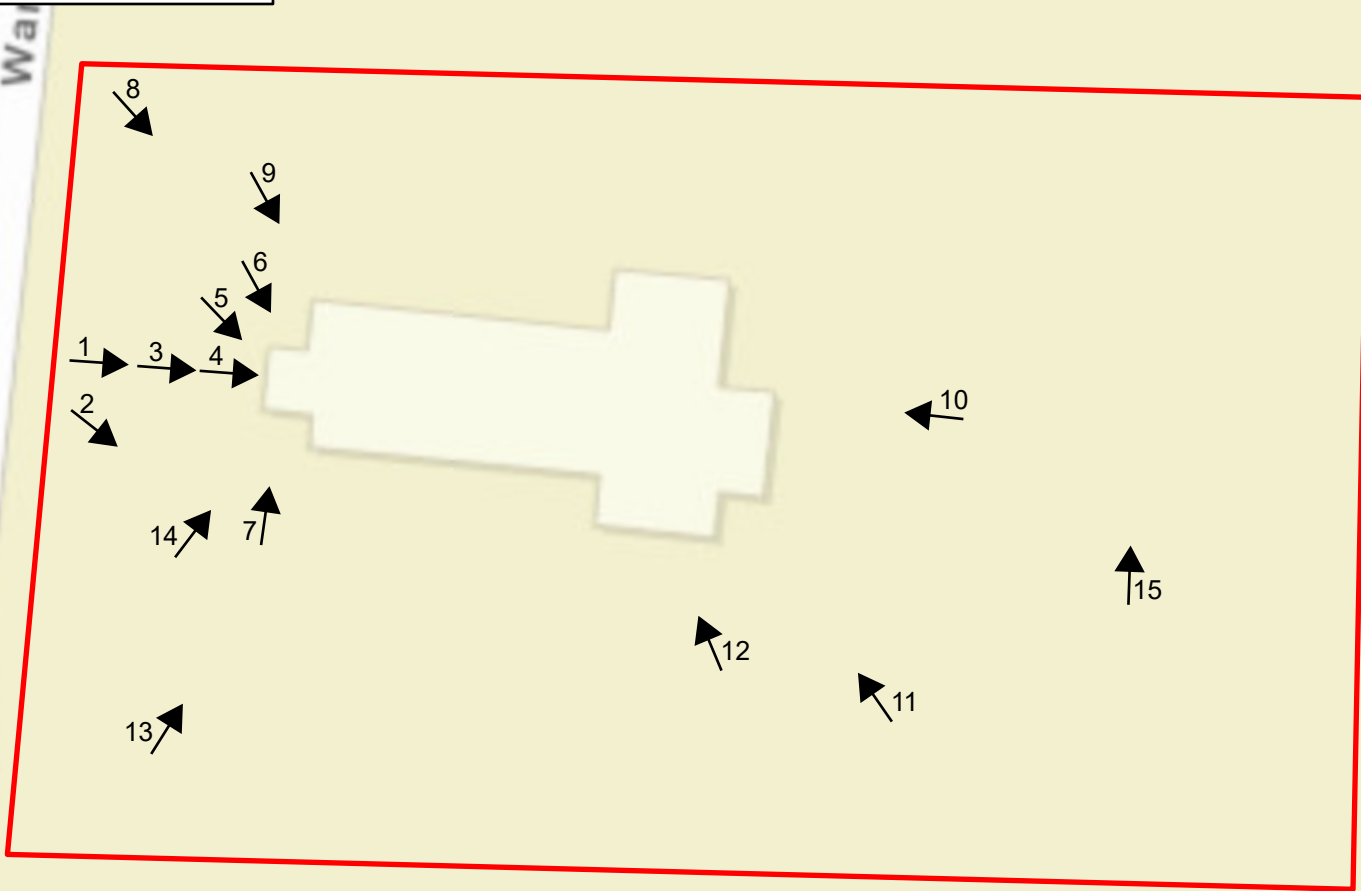
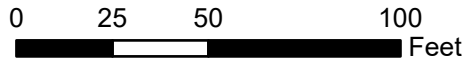


SKETCH MAP & PHOTO KEY

Union Zion Baptist Church
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311


 Nominated Boundary


 Photo Location & Number



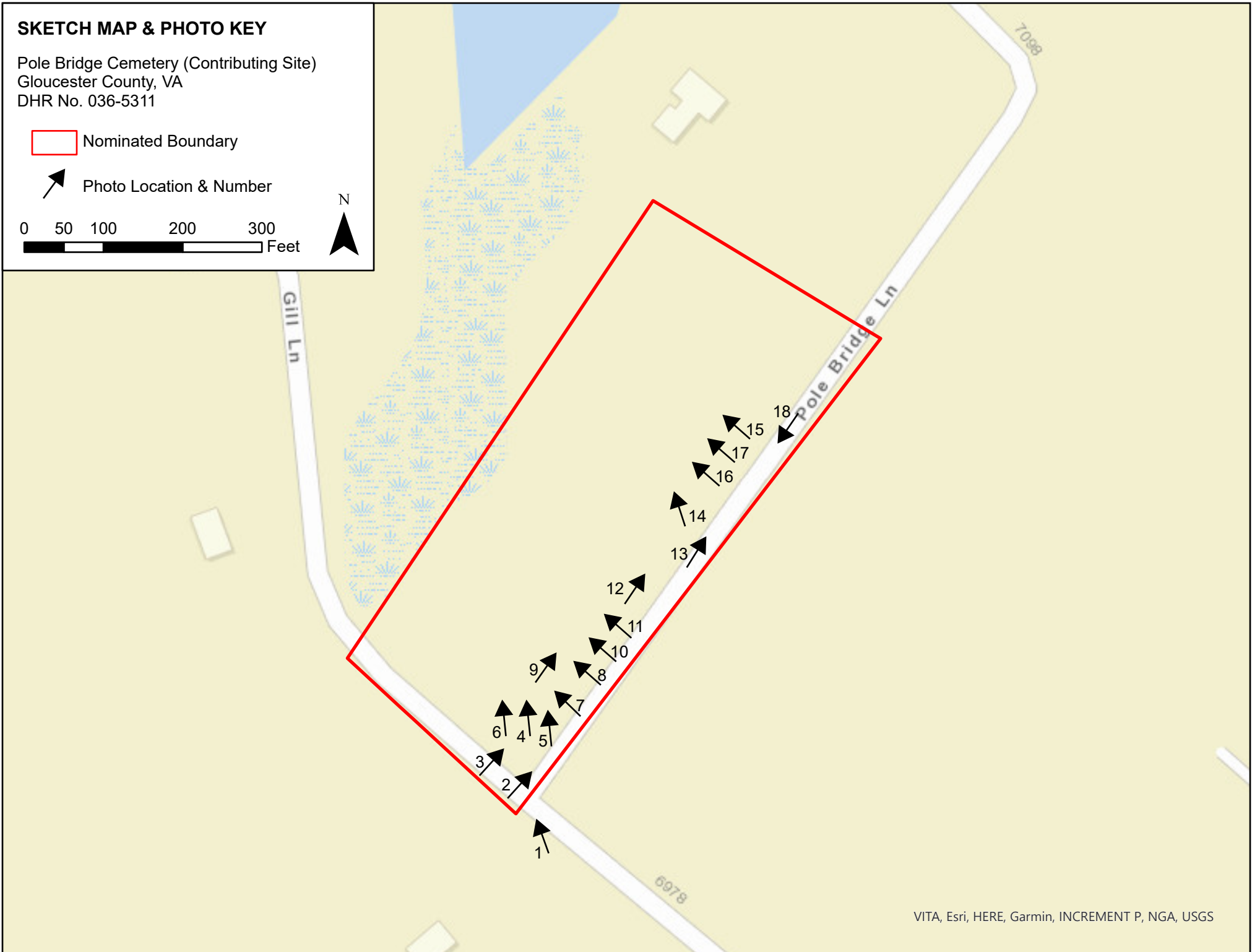
SKETCH MAP & PHOTO KEY

Pole Bridge Cemetery (Contributing Site)
Gloucester County, VA
DHR No. 036-5311

 Nominated Boundary

 Photo Location & Number

0 50 100 200 300 Feet









Union Zion Baptist Church



Union Zion Baptist Church



Union Zion Baptist Church
1867







Union Zion Baptist Church

UNION ZION
BAPTIST CHURCH
150
YEARS
OF
SERVICE

6745









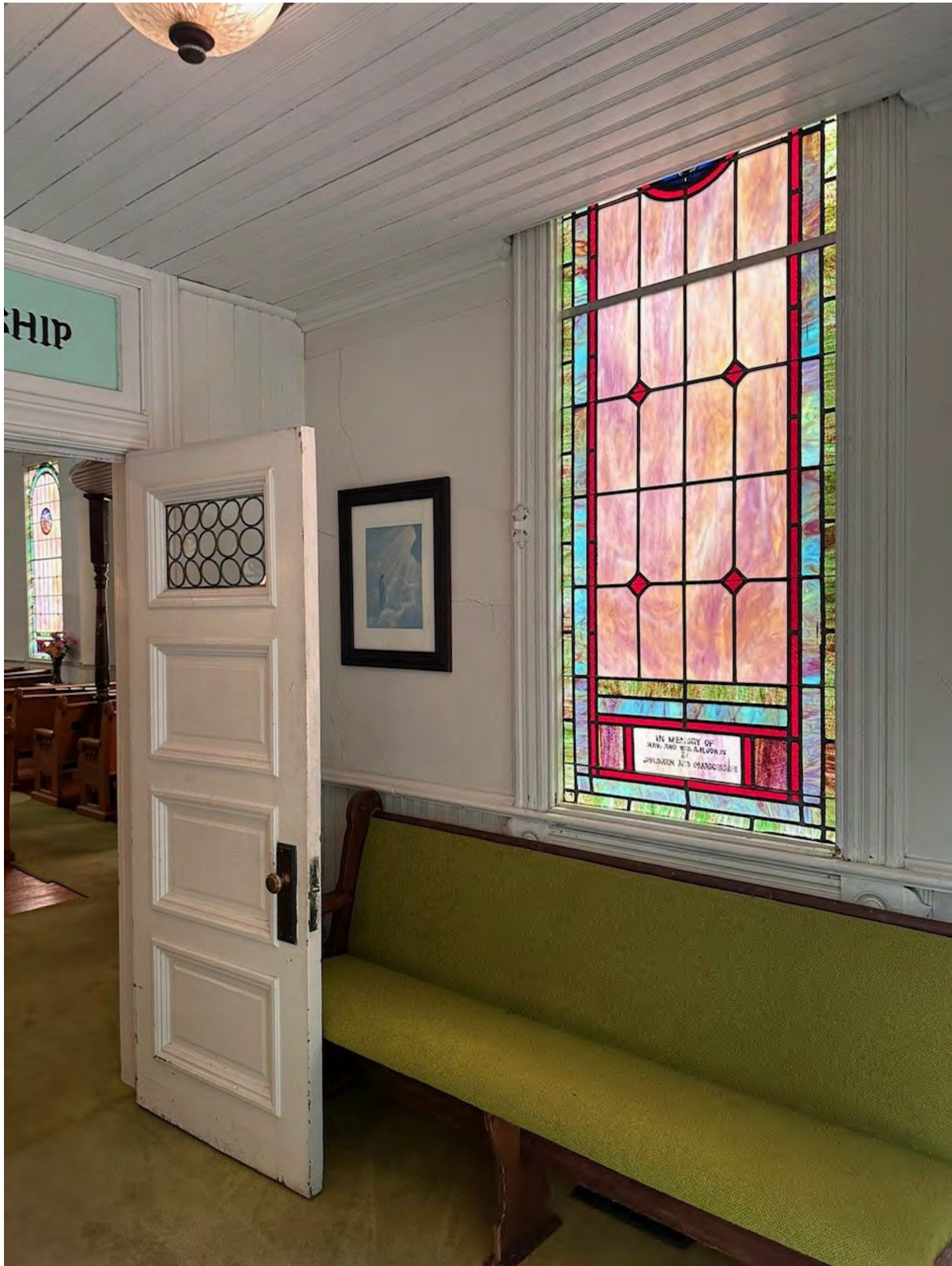






ENTER TO WORSHIP





















The Lord is my
light AND MY
salvation
Whom shall I fear?























ELMER O. WILLIS
1924
U.S. AIR FORCE
MAY 2, 1950
AUG. 11, 2011

WILLIS
ELMER O. WILLIS
1924 - 2011

WILLIS
ELMER O. WILLIS
1924 - 2011

WILLIS
ELMER O. WILLIS
1924 - 2011















