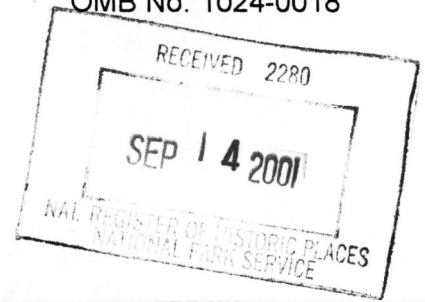


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Prairie Mission

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1/4 mi. se of jct. SR 28 and McCall Road not for publication N/A  
city or town Catherine vicinity N/A  
state Alabama code AL county Wilcox code 131 zip code 36728

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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      nationally      statewide X locally. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 8/29/01  
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

           
Signature of commenting or other official Date

      
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register
  - removed from the National Register
  - other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper Entered in the National Register Date of Action 10/29/01

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing

3

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3

Noncontributing

\_\_\_\_\_ buildings

\_\_\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_\_\_ objects

\_\_\_\_\_ Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

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

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Education</u>	Sub: <u>School</u>
<u>Religion</u>	<u>Church</u>
<u>Funerary</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Vacant/Not in use</u>	Sub: _____
<u>Religion</u>	<u>Church</u>
<u>Funerary</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick/Concrete

roof Metal: Tin

walls Wood: Weatherboard

other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Name of Property: Prairie Mission

County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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Narrative Description

The Prairie Mission is located on a cleared level site approximately one-quarter mile southeast of the junction of State Road 28 and McCall Road in Wilcox County, Alabama. It is a locally significant example of a late-nineteenth-century educational mission built by a small northern religious group. The school faces north looking toward a dirt road, a church and cemetery, and a mid-20th-century residence. Prairie Mission was built in 1895 for the purpose of educating African American children in rural Wilcox County. The school building was named in honor of Mrs. Jennie Hastings Gillespie, the first Junior Secretary of the Women's General Missionary Society of the United Presbyterians of North America (UPNA). At the time of construction, many believed Prairie Mission to be the finest school building for African Americans in Wilcox County. Prairie Mission was the smallest of the missions in the county, serving grades one through nine. Students wishing to continue their education went to Miller's Ferry, the first mission founded in Wilcox County by the UPNA (Peters: 1949).

Besides being taught regular public school subjects, females were instructed in sewing and cooking, while male students were given manual training in connection with the upkeep of buildings and helping in the gardens. Emphasis was also placed on Christian ideals, thrift, and industry. Teachers were paid small salaries and were required to purchase their own supplies. Parents had to purchase schoolbooks for the children. In the 1950s the school did receive some money from the county (Peters:1949).

Principals who served at Prairie included Professor J.H. Oliver, Rev. Mr. James, Rev. Mr. Imes, Rev. J.N. Cotton, Professor T.M. Eliot, Rev. J.W.E. Wade, Professor William T. Peters (Peters:1949).

In 1958, Prairie Mission ceased from operating as a mission school. A Bible school was conducted in the school in the 1970s. In more recent years, the school has been used as a nutritional center (McCall:2000).

Prairie Mission Church and cemetery are located across McCall Road, north of the school. A church building, built by William Henderson, was originally on the site where the present church is located before the Prairie school was constructed. After the school was built, the old church was torn down and the materials were used to build a dormitory on the property. When students became localized, the dormitory was no longer necessary. In 1937, the present church was rebuilt with materials from the dormitory on the original site of the first church. The earliest grave in the cemetery dates from 1908.

The school building retains a high degree of integrity. Prairie Mission School is a one-story, wood frame educational building with a hip roof covered with tin. A projecting gabled bay extends from the north facade. Atop the gable bay is a square, weatherboarded bell tower featuring a pyramidal roof of pressed tin in a shield pattern. Central wooden louvers are located in the main section of the tower. The tower also features a graduated base with pressed tin in a shield pattern. A cross once topped the bell tower.

The north facade of Prairie Mission School features a central projecting gabled bay extending three-quarters of the facade. The bay contains the primary decorative elements of the building. Two double-leaf door entrances with concrete stoops flank two centered 12/8 double hung sash windows. Small shed roofs supported by brackets cover the stoops and are surmounted by 5-pane vertical light transoms. Two 12/8 double hung sash windows are located on the main rectangular block on the north facade. The pedimented gable end features vertical tongue and groove clapboard, fish scale and diamond pattern shingle work as well as three 6/6 windows.

Weatherboard siding serves as the covering for the exterior walls. Two interior brick chimneys rise above the roof line. All of the windows have been replaced with modern sash with a 6" reduction in vertical dimension with no change in width. The foundation material is brick infilled with concrete blocks.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Name of Property: Prairie Mission  
County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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The east and west elevations are composed of six bays consisting of five 12/8 double hung sash windows and one wooden door. A small gabled bay extends from the south elevation and contains restrooms; it was added in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A smaller shed roof addition on the south elevation contains a pantry.

The interior of Prairie Mission School is quite intact and consists of a large, central auditorium that runs the length of the main block and is flanked by two narrow classrooms on each side. Photographs of graduating classes adorn the walls in the auditorium. Twin vestibules accessed from the entrance doors flank a central room. Originally this space was continuous but was partitioned for a principal's office in the mid-20th century. The northwest classroom features narrow flush horizontal boards, vertical wainscoting, a built-in bookcase, chalkboard, and original wood doors. The southwest classroom was transformed into a modern kitchen in years past and features flush horizontal boards and vertical wainscoting. The northeast classroom features beaded board siding, a built-in bookcase, narrow width oak flooring, beaded vertical wainscoting, and a chalkboard. The southeast classroom is identical to the northeast classroom in detailing. A low raised stage is located at the south end of the auditorium. A flight of narrow stairs is recessed into the stage on each side and a similar set gives access to doors opening into the southwest and southeast classrooms. The room was arranged so that it could be subdivided into classrooms by means of folding wooden doors or curtains hanging from a center board partition that extended about two feet down from the ceiling. A single column is located in the center of the room. Chimney flues for cast-iron stoves are located on either wall just south of the division. Small windows are located high on the walls and allow light and ventilation from the classrooms and front room to enter the auditorium. Wall and ceiling finishes include 3" beaded vertical wainscoting, flush and beaded horizontal boards, and 1 1/2 " beaded siding. Flooring throughout was replaced in the mid-20th century with narrow width oak.

The Prairie Church is the second church built on the site. The original church building was built by William Henderson on land that was part of his large plantation. He was instrumental in persuading the UPNA to build missions in Wilcox County. Henderson sold over 600 acres to the UPNA to establish a farm and school at Prairie. The old church was torn down and the materials were used to build a dormitory. In the 1930s, all of the students were localized and there was no longer a need for a dormitory. The dorm was torn down and the materials were used to build a church on the site of the original church site in 1937. During subsequent modifications to the church after 1949, the entrance moved from the south facade to the west elevation. The church continues to have a small but active congregation. Pastors of the Prairie Church included Mr. Arter, Rev. J.E. James, Rev. J.N. Cotton, Rev. D.F. White, Rev. C.H. Johnson, Rev. J.W.E. Wade, Rev. R.P. Williams, and Rev. C.C. Brown (Peters: 1949).

Resting on a brick pier foundation, the one-story, wood frame church has a front gable roof comprised of asphalt shingles. The south facade is comprised of many decorative elements. A decorative king-post truss is located in the gable end. An arched window is also in the gable and features a modern air conditioning window unit. A side tower with a pyramidal roof and central wooden louvered ventilators is located on the south facade. Novelty board siding serves as the siding for the tower. The west elevation features a projecting shed roof addition that serves as the entrance to the church. Two double-leaf, six-paneled wood doors provide access to the sanctuary. Novelty board siding also adorns the projecting entryway. All other exterior siding is weatherboard. The west elevation features three 6/6 double hung sash windows.

The north elevation features a projecting shed roof addition with exposed rafters. A wood door and shed roof porch with stairs leading to the ground flank the projecting addition.

The east elevation features four 6/6 double hung sash windows.

The interior is primarily void of any decorative elements. The walls and ceiling are of white plaster. A central altar platform with a recessed seating area is located in the front of the church. There is a center aisle with multiple rows of pews on either side. The pews were donated by the Sixth Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Modern lighting and ceiling fans hang from the ceiling.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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**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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Education \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic Heritage: Black \_\_\_\_\_

Social History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** 1895-1951 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates** 1895 \_\_\_\_\_ 1908 \_\_\_\_\_ 1937 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====  
**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS)** N/A
- 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other state agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository \_\_\_\_\_

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7,8 Page 3

Name of Property: Prairie Mission

County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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The cemetery associated with Prairie Mission is measured at 100' x 100' square. Large cedar and oak trees planted in lines characterize the landscape. Graves face east and range in date from 1908 until the mid-1950s. A chain link fence surrounds the cemetery and a sign adorns the entrance.

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been conducted in association with the Prairie Mission, there exists the potential for subsurface remains on the property.

Statement of Significance

Criterion A: Education/Ethnic History:Black/Social History

Prairie Mission is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its educational legacy, ethnic associations, and social history as it contains the three most public resources associated with rural black communities: the church, school, and cemetery. Prairie Mission is particularly distinctive in that much of its history is the result of social/humanitarian efforts of a small northern religious group. Following in the Progressive spirit of educational reform and reaching out to the disadvantaged, the United Presbyterians of North America (UPNA) established six missions in Wilcox County between 1884 and 1902. These missions were exclusively for the use and education of African Americans after the Reconstruction period when public education was virtually non-existent for blacks in Alabama and especially isolated Wilcox County. The UPNA's goal was to provide educational opportunities rather than promote their religious ideals; however, in all instances in Alabama, UPNA churches evolved at the same time either in adjacent buildings or within the schools themselves. Black-owned private schools existed in Alabama but were only accessible to a small number of African Americans. Mission schools differed from black-owned private schools because missions in the South had a white, northern religious and philanthropic connection. The UPNA encouraged solid, educational programs for rural, southern black children because they believed education was key to building a free society in the South where blacks could participate as first-class citizens.

The UPNA came to Alabama via an ex-Union soldier, William Henderson. Henderson purchased a great deal of land in the western portion of Wilcox County after the Civil War, was elected a local judge during Reconstruction, and ultimately became an important economic and political force in the county. Henderson built the first UPNA church in the county on his land in the 1870s or 80s for himself and his black tenants. It was Henderson who initiated contact with the UPNA's Board of Missions to the Freedmen, appealing to a visiting principal from one of the existing UPNA schools in Tennessee to establish schools in Wilcox County.

Prairie Mission as it exists today evolved over time. The original Prairie church sprang from the first church established by William Henderson at nearby Miller's Ferry. This late 19<sup>th</sup>-century church at Prairie was taken down around the time of the construction of the school in 1895 to build a dormitory for students who boarded. From this time until a new church was constructed in 1937, religious services were conducted in the school. A local cemetery was also established at Prairie Mission. The oldest extant grave marker dates 1908; however, the area was used for burials prior to that time. The Prairie Mission school, church, and cemetery stand as the only extant resources that tell the history of UPNA missionary work in Wilcox County, Alabama.

Consideration A: Religious Properties

Although the nominated property is owned by a religious institution, Prairie Mission derives its significance from education, ethnic associations, and social philanthropy that are indirectly associated with its religious purposes.

Historical Context

In 1706 Presbyterian ministers met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and formed the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the first Presbytery of the New World. As more and more Europeans emigrated to America, Presbyterianism in the New World

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

Name of Property: Prairie Mission

County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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experienced tremendous growth. In the years leading up to the American Revolution, divisions occurred in the denomination. By 1758, Presbyterians had reunited, ready to play a significant role in the American Revolution, after which they, along with other denominations, organized nationally under new ecclesiastical constitutions (Smylie: 1996).

Only a few Presbyterian ministers and laymen openly opposed slavery during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until 1789 that the first General Assembly was held and the topic of slavery began to be debated in the highest offices of the Presbyterian Church (Wilmore: 1983). Prior to these debates, the Presbyterian Synods of New York and Philadelphia issued a public pronouncement in 1787 condemning slavery on biblical, Christian, and humanitarian grounds. The synods urged its members to educate slaves and to push for emancipation so blacks could experience the freedom in society (Wilmore: 1983).

White, Presbyterian masters first introduced Presbyterianism to their slaves, teaching them to read and to memorize passages from the Shorter Catechism and the *Bible*. Slave owners began educating black children first. The master's children often taught the slave children at home since no public education was provided to African American slaves (Wilmore: 1983).

In 1837-1838, the Presbyterian Church USA suffered a split based upon differences over theology, governance, reform, and especially slavery (Smylie 1980). In 1858, two Presbyterian denominations, the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church and the Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, joined together and formed the United Presbyterians of North America (UPNA). The formation of the UPNA evolved out of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. The UPNA prided itself on theological conservatism while maintaining a healthy interest in broad social issues and demonstrating a progressive spirit which was not often found in smaller denominations. The UPNA boasted six colleges and four seminaries under its control in 1858. The UPNA also shouldered responsibility for an extensive foreign mission enterprise. Not only was the UPNA a staunch supporter of education and foreign missions, the UPNA also actively opposed slavery before the Civil War and long before other Presbyterian groups spoke candidly about the immorality of slavery. Disagreements over the institution of slavery with larger Presbyterian denominations initiated the formation of the UPNA.

The Civil War brought about great suffering to African Americans living in the South. Countless numbers of blacks migrated North seeking refuge from the horrors of war and the effects of slavery. Hoping for a better life, many slaves sought sanctuary in the dozens of refugee camps organized by the Union Army. Instead of finding nourishing food and warm shelter, refugees oftentimes discovered the opposite. After learning of the plight of thousands of ex-slaves in the refugee camps, the United Presbyterians of North America responded immediately providing adequate food and shelter to the refugees in the camps (Jamison:1958).

The UPNA realized that conditions in the South were far more likely to get worse or stay the same, then improve after the war. Besides providing the necessities of life to ex-slaves, the UPNA formulated a plan to offer educational programs to African Americans living in refugee camps. The UPNA encouraged educational programs for ex-slaves not only on spiritual grounds, but also because they believed that education was key to building a free society in the South where blacks could participate as first-class citizens (Murray:1966).

In April 1863, Wheeling Presbytery sent Rev. Josiah Stevenson along with eight teachers to work in a refugee camp in Memphis, Tennessee. This first attempt by the UPNA proved successful persuading the leadership of the UPNA to take further action. When the General Assembly of the UPNA met in 1863, it established the Board of Missions to the Freedmen for the purpose of "providing help and education to the Negroes of the South" (Jamison: 1958).

Ministers and teachers in the refugee camps established day and night schools, Sabbath Schools, and even held preaching services. By the summer of 1864, approximately 54 teachers worked in refugee camps continuing the success of the UPNA education project (Jamison:1958).

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Name of Property: Prairie Mission  
County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

After the Confederate surrender in April 1865, the Union Army ceased operation of the refugee camps causing the upheaval and dislocation of thousands of African American refugees. Some refugees moved to the North hoping for better lives, while others found themselves back in the South. Now that the concentration of African Americans in the refugee camps was no more, the UPNA and the Board of Missions to the Freedmen faced tough decisions. Jamison recalls that the UPNA "decided to continue educational work in the South but to make no effort to build up a branch of the UPNA there. Instead, the mission policy thereafter was aimed at educating the Negro to the place where he could organize and run his own institutions and take a full place among the other citizen groups in America" (Jamison: 1958). The UPNA was but one of a number of Northern churches which undertook mission work in the South after the Civil War, but it was one of the smallest denominations to provide these programs (Jamison:1958).

The campaign to support black education in the South was undermined by federal and state governments and by extralegal organizations and tactics. After Reconstruction, black southerners existed in a social system that denied them citizenship and the right to vote. Black education in the South developed within this context (Anderson:1988). The educational outlets that were established for blacks were so fundamentally different than white educational programs. Blacks depended on teaching themselves in their own educational associations, or on private philanthropic groups and missionary societies. The federal government attempted to solve the burden of the emancipated slave by establishing the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865. Due to overwhelming numbers of ex-slaves in the South the Freedmen's Bureau lacked personnel and resources to provide adequate assistance to blacks. Some schools aimed at blacks were formed by the Freedmen's Bureau, but due to the lack of funds, many of these schools were turned over to religious and philanthropic groups. After the termination of the Freedmen's Bureau and the collapse of Reconstruction governments, many religious and philanthropic churches shouldered much of the responsibility for black education in the South. (Murray:1966). Religion-supported education for blacks did exist in Alabama. Talladega College (1865) was established by former slaves with help from the American Missionary Association and the Freedman's Bureau. Under support from the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention, the Alabama Normal and Theological School was opened in 1878 in Selma. Oakwood College (1896) was established with support of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Miles College (1908) was founded by the Alabama Conference of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (Rogers, et.al:1994).

Unfortunately, the Board of Missions to the Freedmen encountered setbacks in funding and support, so that by 1872, the UPNA decided to close down smaller mission schools and concentrate the educational work in Nashville and Knoxville, Tennessee, and in Vicksburg, Mississippi. A majority of the people associated with the mission schools protested the decision. Due to the overwhelming response to keep the mission schools open, the UPNA reversed its decision and began to establish additional mission schools throughout the South. The UPNA eventually organized mission schools for African Americans in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The UPNA also founded a Normal School in Knoxville, Tennessee, where graduates from the mission schools could go to college. Many of the graduates of the normal school returned to the mission schools as teachers (Jamison: 1958).

In 1895, the UPNA once again had concerns regarding the future of the Board of Missions to the Freedmen and the mission schools. In order to sustain the mission schools, the Board of Missions to the Freedmen was released from any responsibility over the mission schools. The UPNA transferred all charge of the mission schools to the power of the Women's General Missionary Society (WGMS). Organized in 1883, the WGMS had a policy stating that they would "only take up such work as it related to women and children" (Jamison:1958). The WGMS had concerns about the lack of educational programs for African Americans in the South. The WGMS took all responsibility of the work relating to the mission schools. Before this shift in leadership occurred, steps were being taken to establish mission schools in the state of Alabama, in particular, Wilcox County (Jamison:1958).

While visiting friends in Alabama, Miss Eliza Wallace, principal of the Normal School in Knoxville, Tennessee, met Mr. William Henderson. Born in 1837 in Scotland, Henderson migrated from Ohio to Wilcox County during Reconstruction. Henderson was an officer in the Union Army (McCall:2000). Henderson purchased a great deal of land in the western portion of Wilcox County and created a large and profitable plantation and mercantile business. By 1870, the value

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Section 8 Page 6

Name of Property: Prairie Mission  
County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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of Henderson's real estate topped \$12,000. His personal estate was valued at \$2250 (1870 Census). Henderson was also elected a local judge during Reconstruction. A devout UPNA Presbyterian, Henderson built a UPNA church on his plantation in the 1870s or 1880s for his African American tenants (Jamison: 1958).

While meeting with Miss Wallace, Henderson petitioned her to extend the mission school program into Wilcox County. As of 1884, no public schools for blacks had been established in Wilcox County, Alabama. As Miss Wallace and Mr. Henderson were vitally interested in educational programs for African Americans, the outcome was the establishment of the first UPNA mission in 1884 at Miller's Ferry in Wilcox County. The first mission began at Miller's Ferry in the church Henderson built on his property. Miss Henrietta Mason was in charge of the Miller's Ferry School until 1887, when Professor P.C. Cloud was chosen principal of the school. In 1889 the first school building was erected using some funds from the county. In 1895 the school building was destroyed by an incendiary bomb. In the late 1950s B.T. Ridgeway was principal of the Miller's Ferry School with a staff that included one Bible teacher, three maintenance workers, and several county teachers. The school attendance was more than four hundred. Miller's Ferry continued to operate through the 1960s, offering both elementary and high school work (Parker:1977).

All together, the UPNA established six missions in Wilcox County: Miller's Ferry (1884); Prairie Mission (1895), located five miles northwest of Miller's Ferry and consisting of a 600-acre farm and school building that was also used for church services, a teachers' home, and a dormitory reconstructed from an old church on the property; Camden Academy (1886), featured a combination school and church, a teachers' home, and two dormitories; Canton Bend (1896), destroyed by fire in 1952 and was discontinued; Midway Mission (1901), located four miles from Prairie and was on land donated by two planters in the vicinity. A one-room cabin served as the school building. The UPNA operated Midway Mission only a few years and then turned the school over to the public school system; and Arlington Literary and Industrial Institute (1902), located at Annemanie, the only location in Wilcox County where blacks could own property (Parker: 1977). All of these mission schools were eventually staffed by graduates of Knoxville Normal School or Camden High School. According to Jamison, the UPNA did not force Presbyterianism on any of the children attending the mission schools (Jamison: 1958).

The UPNA also established schools at Muscle Shoals and Summerfield but these were operated only a short time and turned over to the public school system (Parker: 1977).

Not surprisingly, the UPNA missions in Wilcox County quickly became centers for African American community and life. Not only were the buildings used for educational and religious pursuits, but also for social and recreational activities. Inez Parker suggests that "there developed a sense of possession [of the mission schools] at a time when many possessed nothing else" (Parker: 1977).

The UPNA had to work to overcome the problem of its relationship to the Southern Presbyterian Church. Before and during the Civil War, many religious denominations split over the issue of slavery, forming Northern and Southern branches (Murray, 1966). The UPNA never ceased in supporting the northern cause. After the war, these divisions were not healed. The Southern Presbyterian Church failed in the educational work for blacks because they insisted on directing their work within the framework of inequality (Murray:1966). Many southerners upheld racist beliefs, while missions challenged traditional southern beliefs and eliminated the idea of black inferiority. White resistance and violence was commonplace in response to the establishment of missions in Wilcox County. Missions were constantly threatened and some even burned during the course of white resistance (Jamison: 1958). For example, in 1895 the school building at Miller's Ferry was destroyed by an incendiary bomb (Parker: 1977) .

The UPNA missions played a vital role in early African American education in Wilcox County and the South as a whole since southern states refused to assume complete responsibility for educational programs targeted towards African Americans. As late as 1916, the United States Bureau of Education listed 160 schools in the South under Presbyterian control and leadership (Murray: 1966).

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**10. Geographical Data**  
=====

**Acreage of Property** 5.27 acres

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	459640	3556050	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Lee Anne Hewett, Survey Coordinator; Trina Binkley, NR Reviewer

organization Alabama Historical Commission date September 29, 2000 telephone (334)242-3184

city or town Montgomery state Alabama zip code 36130

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====  
**Property Owner**  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name United Presbyterians of Wilcox County, Inc. Presbyterian Church (USA)

street & number P.O. Box 354 telephone (334) 225-4452

city or town Catherine state AL zip code 36728

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8,9,10 Page 7

Name of Property: Prairie Mission  
County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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In 1928, the UPNA leadership underwent a merge in leadership. The Board of Home Missions, the Board of Missions to the Freedmen, and the Church Extension unified into the Board of American Missions. After this consolidation, the only remaining installation in the South that was controlled by the new Board was Knoxville Normal School. The WGMS supported all the rest of the educational programs for African Americans (Jamison: 1958). The six UPNA supported missions in Wilcox County all lasted well into the mid-20th century. At this time, many missions were phased out and the students transferred to public schools in the Wilcox County system. By 2000, all the buildings associated with UPNA missions in Wilcox County are gone except for the school, church, and cemetery at Prairie Mission. Prairie Mission represents the last vestige of the movement by the United Presbyterians of North America to provide quality educational programs for African Americans in Wilcox County, Alabama.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of Prairie Mission are defined as legal parcel 030736 and include the Prairie School, Prairie Church, and cemetery.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Prairie Mission are those that are historically associated with the school, church, and cemetery property.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Photographs Page 8

Name of Property: Prairie Mission

County and State: Wilcox, Alabama

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Photograph Log

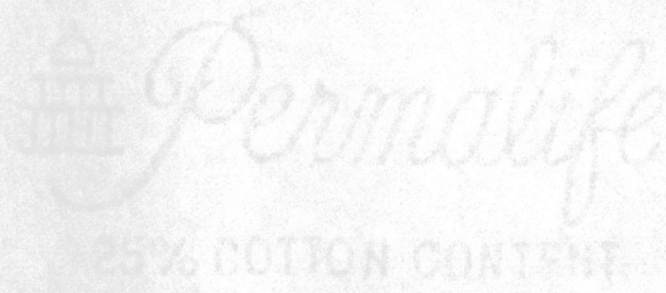
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Name of photographer: Lee Anne Hewett

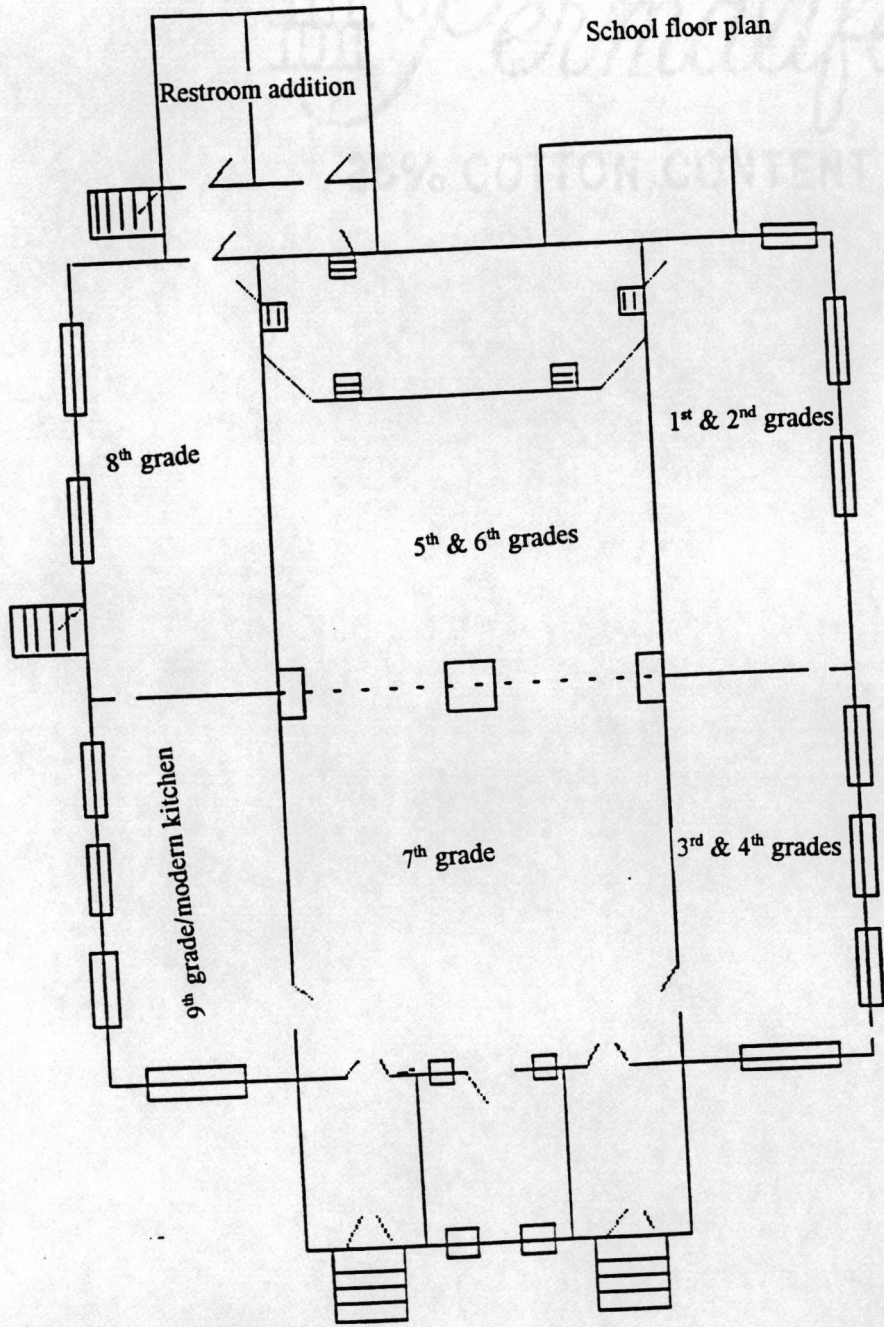
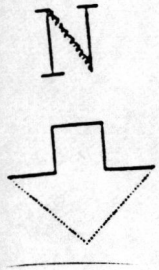
Date of photograph: August 24, 2000

Location of Original Negatives: Alabama Historical Commission, 468 S. Perry St. Montgomery, AL 36130-0900

- Photograph 1: View of Prairie Mission school, facing south
- Photograph 2: View of west elevation of Prairie Mission school, facing east
- Photograph 3: View of east elevation of Prairie Mission school, facing west
- Photograph 4: View of south elevation of Prairie Mission school, facing north
- Photograph 5: Close-up of steeple and decorative elements in gable end of Prairie Mission school, facing southeast
- Photograph 6: Close-up of door detail of Prairie Mission school, facing southwest
- Photograph 7: View of interior main auditorium of Prairie Mission school, facing southeast
- Photograph 8: Close-up detail of built-in bookcase located on the stage of Prairie Mission school, facing west
- Photograph 9: View of interior main auditorium of Prairie Mission school, facing north
- Photograph 10: View of interior walls in main auditorium of Prairie Mission school, facing northwest
- Photograph 11: View of interior wall in main auditorium of Prairie Mission school, facing west
- Photograph 12: View of northeast classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing southeast
- Photograph 13: Close-up of chalkboard detail in northeast classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing southwest
- Photograph 14: View of northwest classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing southwest
- Photograph 15: View of modern kitchen in original southwest classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing southwest
- Photograph 16: View of modern kitchen in original southwest classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing north
- Photograph 17: View of modern kitchen in original southwest classroom in Prairie Mission school, facing south
- Photograph 18: View of south facade of Prairie Church, facing north
- Photograph 19: View of west elevation of Prairie Church, facing east
- Photograph 20: View of north elevation of Prairie Church, facing south
- Photograph 21: View of interior sanctuary of Prairie Church, facing northeast
- Photograph 22: View of interior sanctuary of Prairie Church, facing south
- Photograph 23: View of cemetery, facing northeast

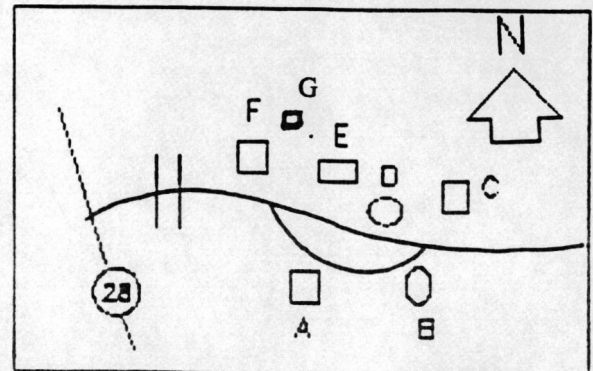


# Prairie Mission Wilcox County, Alabama



Site Map

- A. Prairie Mission School
- B. Boy's Dormitory site
- C. Principal's Residence site
- D. Girl's Dorm site
- E. Modern House
- F. Prairie Church
- G. Cemetery



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Prairie Mission

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ALABAMA, Wilcox

DATE RECEIVED: 9/14/01                      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/25/01  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/09/01                  DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/30/01  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01001171

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

\_\_\_ ACCEPT    \_\_\_ RETURN    \_\_\_ REJECT    \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



589 NNNB ——— CEMFOrestHve 008

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co, Alabama

#1



589 NNNB P—CFWFORES TRVE 012

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#2



589 NNNB -- CFWF0851902 010

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama

#3



589

NNNB

— CMI FOR ESTATE

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co, Alabama  
#4



589 NNNB ——— 601 Forest Ave 013

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#5



589 NNNB --- CFW Forest Ave 009

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co, Alabama

# 6



589 NNNB — CFMFOE3TR02 017

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#7



**K**  
SODA-ACID  
FOR FIRE  
TURN BOTTOM UP

SODA-ACID  
FOR FIRE  
TURN BOTTOM UP

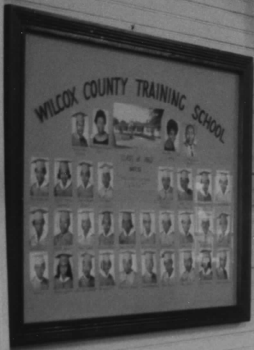
PLAYSKOOL

589 NNNB — CFW Forest Ave 015

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
# 8



Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#9



THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS  
ARE MEMBERS OF THE  
MEMORIAL SOCIETY OF  
THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH IN MEMORY OF  
WILLIAM B. BROWN, D.D.  
DECEASED FEBRUARY 18, 1887



589 NNNB --- CFWFOrestHve 016

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#10

THIS BUILDING WAS ERECTED  
A.D. 1895 BY THE JUNIOR  
MISSIONARY SOCIETIES OF  
THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH IN MEMORY OF  
MRS. JENNIE HASTINGS GILLESPIE,  
THEIR FIRST SECRETARY.



589 MNHB ——— CFMFORESTHVE 024

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#11



589 NNNB --- CFMFORESTRUE 018

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#12



589 NNNB — CFWFORESTRY 019

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co., Alabama  
#13



589 NNB --- CFWFofestHve 020

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#14



589 MNMB --- CFUFOESTHVE 022

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#15



589 NNNN — CFMFB 023

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co, Alabama  
#16



589 NNNB -- CFWFofestive 021

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co., Alabama  
#17



589 NNNB X CFU Forest Ave 004

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co, Alabama  
#18



589 NNNB 00 CFWFOTESTRUE 005

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#19



589 NNNB 23 CFMFOrestHve 003

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#20



589 NNNB @ CIPU PRESERVE 006

Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
# 21



589 NNNB — CFMFOESTHVE 007

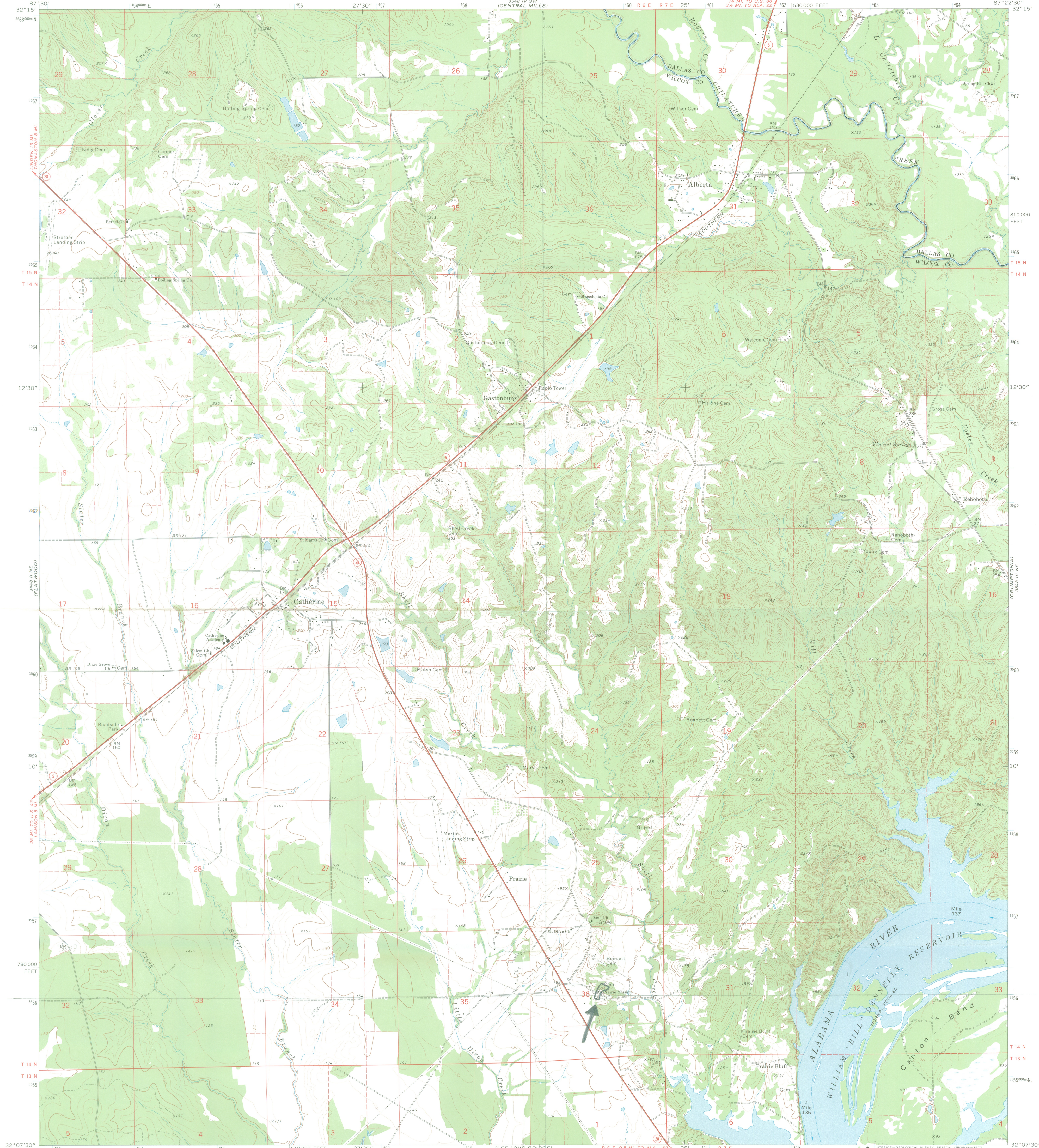
Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama  
#22



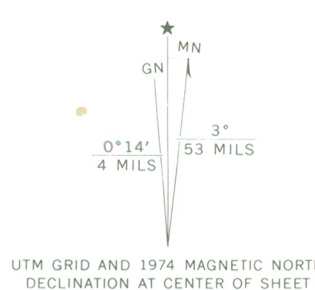
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Prairie Mission  
Wilcox Co. Alabama

#23



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1972, and in part by USCE 1961  
Field checked 1974  
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Alabama coordinate  
system, west zone (transverse Mercator)  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 16, shown in blue. 1927 North American datum  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 5-FOOT CONTOURS  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

CATHERINE, ALA.  
N3207.5-W8722.5/7.5

1974

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UTM: 16-459640-3556050

Prairie Mission, Wilcox Co., AL