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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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Monongahela City

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Southwest corner, Seventh and West Main Streets N/A Not for publication

city or town Monongahela City N/A vicinity

state Pennsylvania code PA county Washington code 125 zip code 15063

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bruce D. Shaw
Signature of certifying official/Title

9/14/02
Date

State of 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 official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Edson B. Beall

Date of Action

11/7/02

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

Number of Resources within Property
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 (Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials
 (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Slate

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Monongahela City
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Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is a small Gothic Revival style building constructed of handmade brick on a level lot on Monongahela City's West Main Street. The 78 foot by 48 foot brick shell was built in 1871, including the 100 foot high wood steeple, but the interior finishes of the building were not completed until 1894. To the east is Chess Park, a one block town park centered on a gazebo. To the west of the church is Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church, an intact 1908 Gothic Revival building. Behind Bethel AME is an aluminum sided two story frame house, built about 1910. Though the house once occupied the same parcel, and it formerly served as the church's parsonage, it is excluded because of its complete renovation with new siding, aluminum porch railings, and other details, and its unrelated architecture. Across and up and down West Main Street from the church are two story houses, mostly in the Italianate style, intermixed with a few other churches and some commercial buildings. Bethel AME is an intact example of a simple nineteenth century Gothic Revival church, having undergone almost no changes since it was completed in the 1890s. Minor changes, visible but not predominant, include installation of protective window coverings and a new concrete stairwell in the rear leading down to the basement. The original steeple was destroyed by lightning in 1987 but was accurately reconstructed afterward, based on an 1876 atlas drawing.

Essentially "T" shaped in plan, the Bethel AME Church building consists of a three bay by three bay brick sanctuary, approximately thirty-five feet wide and fifty feet deep, with a steep gable roof clad in slate whose gable end faces West Main Street, and a smaller brick Sunday School wing (25 feet by 48 feet) attached to the rear, with its gable end facing Seventh Street, the side street. The windows are all pointed-arched with stained glass, in openings that rise about nine feet from the sill to the top of each arch, except the large window at the Main Street facade, which is about 16 feet in height from sill to top of arch. All first floor windows have stained glass dating from about 1915. The largest stained glass window faces West Main Street and is divided into several sections by wood tracery. The bays are separated by brick buttresses with stone caps. Three doors face Main Street, one into the base of the tower which serves as a small narthex, and two from the edges of the Sunday School wing where that section of the building extends (in the "T" shaped plan) beyond both sides of the sanctuary. The entrance at the base of the tower consists of a pair of two panel doors with heavy millwork typical of the period. The door on the west side of the sanctuary (leading from the Sunday School wing to Diamond Alley) is a single leaf with four panels. The door on the east side is a 1998 reconstruction which follows the original four panel design, replacing a flush hollow core door installed about 1975.

At the northeast corner of the sanctuary is a square (12 foot by 12 foot) brick tower crowned with a high wood steeple. The brick tower has three stages, the lowest of which contains the doorway with a pointed-arched stained glass transom on the West Main Street side and a pointed-arched window on the Seventh Street side. Above the doorway and window are round windows. The top stage of the tower is a belfry with louvered pointed arches on all four sides. At the watertable at the base of the tower is a datestone with the date 1871 to the right side of the door, and a similar one with "AME" on the left side. Like the walls around it, the tower has layered brick buttresses at each corner with stone caps where the buttresses step in at each stage. The tower is crowned with a tall, five stage steeple.

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The steeple has quarter-circle, dentil-like brackets at cornice level. The first stage of the steeple has a concave curved surface on each side, curving up from a square base to an octagonal form in the upper stages. The second stage has louvered openings in four of the eight faces, each sheltered by a small gable. The lower four stages have shingled surfaces (asphalt shingles) in a color that matches the historic roof slate of the adjoining roof. There are metal ribs at the corners of the steeple and between the stages. The top stage is all metal and contains a lightning rod. The steeple at present is a reconstruction of the original design, installed after the greatly reworked original was destroyed by lightning in 1987. The steeple surfaces had been changed over the years, in re-roofing, eliminating the louvers and ribs, but the original design was restored in 1987-1988. A bell cast in 1837 was installed within the belfry as part of the 1987 tower reconstruction.

The interior of the first floor consists of two large rooms: the Sanctuary and the Sunday School (the latter which doubles as a dining hall). Both rooms were built as tall, open spaces with ceilings sloped along the bottom chords of the scissor trusses to suggest the roof form, as is common in Gothic Revival style architecture. Both have ornamental trusses in the ceilings as well as side walls punctuated by regularly-spaced, pointed arched openings.

The Sanctuary has wood wainscot up to a chair rail. The wainscot has been covered with carpeting across the front of the church. The windows are in curved plaster reveals. The chancel consists of a pulpit and chairs on a raised platform, up three steps, which is surrounded by a semi-circular communion rail. Behind the chancel is a shallow, pointed-arched niche in the wall. An open bible has been painted in the arch, and surrounding the arch are the words "The Lord is in His Holy Temple" in goldenrod-colored paint (the painting is believed to date from at least as early as 1950, but has been repainted recently). To the west side of the chancel, a choir loft has been added (ca.1930), a step or two higher than the chancel. It is a carpeted platform surrounded by a waist-height curtain on a rod supported by three turned wood posts. The pews are straight in plan with gently curved backs. There are some very small ovidarts and other carvings in trim of the pew ends. The pews were reconditioned in 1993 and fixed seat cushions were added at that time. At the rear of the sanctuary, the tower forms a square narthex with double swinging doors on the west side of the enclosure. At the northwest corner of the sanctuary, across from the tower, a small interior enclosure, originally a choir dressing room, similar in size to the base of the tower, now serves as a stairwell to the basement. The sanctuary has a sloped ceiling with wood trusses between the window bays. The trusses contain cut-out circular ornamentation and are painted brown, as is all the wood trim in the sanctuary. The plastered walls of the sanctuary are painted off-white. The floor is covered in a heavy, deep red carpeting.

The Sunday School room is a longer (east-west) than the Sanctuary is wide, but is narrow in the north-south direction, with a kitchen at the west end partitioned off from the larger room by eight-foot-high walls which are not connected to the high, sloped ceiling above. A smaller enclosure next to the kitchen contains the cellar stairs and a side entrance. The enclosure at the cellar stairs and side entrance is constructed of vertical wood boards. The ceiling of the Sunday School room is high and sloped to follow the scissor trusses of the roof structure. Like the Sanctuary, it has ornamental wood trusses at each bay, but without the circular ornaments. The walls have wainscot, painted brown, as in the Sanctuary. The floor is carpeted. The kitchen enclosure contains the typical kitchen appliances and some built-in wood cabinets.

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The stairs from the Sunday School to the cellar are a steep set of wood winders. They lead down to a finished area with rest rooms. The restrooms are a combination of c1920 features and some recent modifications. Beyond the rest rooms, the cellar consists of an open space beneath the Sunday School, with a door leading to the outside, and two finished rooms and several storage spaces beneath the sanctuary. The rooms below the sanctuary are tucked into the spaces between stone bearing walls that were built to support the sanctuary floor at the one third points of the floor joist spans. Only the center area was originally excavated, with crawl spaces to either side. About three-fourths of the crawl space area was excavated in the mid 1980s to provide more usable space for the congregation, and the stairway to the back of the Sanctuary (in the former choir dressing room) was added at that time.

In 1997-1999, several features of the church were restored in a project funded in part by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Keystone Historic Preservation Grants program. The project included repairs to the slate roof, spot pointing, and plaster repairs. Several warped doors were also repaired. The ca. 1970 hollow core door to the Sunday School room from the Seventh Street side was replaced with a reconstruction to match the original design. A section of the basement was enclosed at that time with modern materials to provide a second office space for the pastor.

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.)

- [x] 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.
[x] 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.)

Property is:

- [x] 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage--Black

Period of Significance

1871-1952

Significant Dates

1871

1894

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Blythe, John

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

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 #

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 590900 4451080
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
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 Terry A. Necciai, RA
organization Terry A. Necciai, RA, Historic Preservation Consulting date 21 April 2002
street & number 2334 Murray Avenue telephone (412) 521-9104
city or town Pittsburgh state Pennsylvania zip code 15217

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Bethel AME Church Trustee Board
street & number Southwest corner, West Main at Seventh Street telephone (724) 258-6491
city or town Monongahela City state Pennsylvania zip code 15063

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church building is significant under Criterion C for Architecture, as an outstanding, though modestly-sized example of Gothic Revival style design. Additionally, the building is significant under Criterion C for Architecture, as the work of prominent local architect/builder John Blythe, one of about a dozen locally-important brick buildings Blythe had under construction in 1869-1872.¹ The church is the only local example of a building of relatively sophisticated design built by an African American congregation,² on a conspicuous site, in the nineteenth century, and as such, it is all the more unusual for having been built shortly after the Civil War. It is also significant under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage as the center of social interaction among the area's African American ethnic community since the 1870s. The church is also a locally unusual example of a building of relatively sophisticated design built by an African American congregation. It is the oldest community focal point for the African American families in Monongahela City and surrounding areas.³ Home to one of the oldest AME congregations in southwestern Pennsylvania,⁴ this building has served an educational and social function for over a hundred and thirty years. The Period of Significance begins in 1871 with the erection of the brick exterior of the building according to John Blythe's plans, and concludes to 1952, through which time the church served as an important center for Monongahela's African American community. The property meets Criteria Consideration A for being owned by a religious organization because its significance lies in secular areas of history and architectural significance.

The Bethel AME Church building was constructed at the culmination of about a century of African American presence in the Monongahela City area, a century in which Black citizens rose from their earliest station in the community, mostly as slaves, to free and active citizens and owners of a conspicuous and prominent church building. The Bethel AME building is the oldest built landmark of this African American enclave. Monongahela City straddles the original line between Nottingham and Fallowfield Townships, both townships where there were substantial populations of slaves prior to the Gradual Abolition Act of 1780-82.⁵ In 1782, 26 Fallowfield Township residents held 107 slaves (the largest number of any township in the county), and nine Nottingham Township residents held 28 slaves.⁶ Though the presence of African Americans in the Monongahela area's population can be traced back to slaves brought here in the late eighteenth century, it is not known for certain if any of the founders of the Bethel AME congregation were persons who had been held in captivity in this vicinity. However, the same parts of Washington County where there larger numbers of slaves in the county in the 1780s are the areas where the larger Free Black settlements were located in 1830. Many of the area's oldest African American families came here as Free Blacks or as escaping slaves from the south in the first half of the nineteenth century. As slavery was gradually abolished, the town became home to a community of Free Blacks, some of whom moved here from other towns connected to Monongahela City by early highways and/or the Monongahela River. By 1830, the greatest number of Free Blacks in Washington County (92) was in Pike Run Township, which had been formed after 1782 from the southern half of Fallowfield Township, while the northern half of the old township (part of which is now in the Monongahela City limits) contained the second highest African American population at 74.⁷ In 1833,⁸ a half century after African Americans were first mentioned as slaves in local records, the Free Black citizens of Monongahela

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City formed the Bethel AME congregation. It is believed that nearly all African Americans living in the town prior to the 1880s were affiliated in some way with this congregation. It was the first permanent African American institution established in the eastern half of Washington County.⁹ In an 1859 directory of the city, about 20 African American families are listed among about 300 listings. The city's African American population has remained between 5% and 10% of the total population since then.

BETHEL AME AND MONONGAHELA CITY'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The presence of African Americans in Monongahela City from the beginning is underscored by the fact that Joseph Parkison, founder of the city, was a slaveholder. Parkison laid the town out in the 1790s at his river ferry which he had established as a business about 1770.¹⁰ The ferry was operated, at least in its latter years, by Richard Manks, believed to have been the first Free African American to live in the town.¹¹ Several other early residents and leaders of the town also had slaves.¹² Additionally a number of African American families came into the city as free citizens before Bethel AME was founded, such as the Catlins who came before 1834.¹³ The Catlin family, members of Bethel AME, operated barber shops in the town continuously until about 1980.¹⁴

The local African American community gradually rose from a slave population and a small group of Free Blacks to a relatively successful community primarily of tradesmen and their families. The growth of Bethel AME as a congregation parallels the group's evolving status in the greater community. Bethel AME first shared or used older cast-off church buildings,¹⁵ and then built its first building about 1849-1858 on what was then Fair Street (now Sixth Street), about three blocks southeast of the current building.¹⁶ The Fair Street Building was used until about 1871.

While housed at the Fair Street location, the church became the core of a growing African American neighborhood, and it served as the educational and social center for local African Americans in an era when some of the local schools and other institutions in the greater community were struggling with questions of segregation and integration based on race. Some institutions in the local area were completely open to a racially integrated society in the decades prior to the Civil War, while others experienced turmoil and changing mores in alternating periods of integration and segregation fueled by racism and progressive thinking of the various movements of the era.¹⁷ This can be seen in early school board minutes for the Monongahela City and adjoining Carroll Township schools: some schools were fully integrated, while others barred African American students in some years and not others.¹⁸ In this period, Bethel AME became an important focal point of social interaction for young members of the African American community as families held events at the church to assure that their sons and daughters met others of the same background.¹⁹ In this regard, the Bethel AME congregation was part of a network of African American communities across the county and throughout the Monongahela Valley that often held joint functions at one town or another to make up for the small numbers of African Americans within any one town.²⁰ These social functions were carried by the congregation into the new building as it was completed, and the building came to symbolize the social dimension of the community through such activities.

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Moving to the large new building on Main Street not only gave the African American community a larger and more prominent center for community activities, but it also made new kinds of racially-integrated interactions possible. For instance, the construction project was considered to be newsworthy and of roughly equal importance to a number of other construction projects underway around 1872,²¹ and the church was the only Monongahela ecclesiastical building depicted in a new atlas of drawings of over 200 sites in the county published in 1876.²² In time, it became a place where the African American and white communities met together, such as at a widely-attended Election Day dinner sponsored by the congregation in the present building for several decades in the mid-twentieth century.²³

The Fair Street building, used until the current church was ready for occupancy, subsequently became a family home. The building was torn down around 1960. Prior to the move to West Main and Seventh Streets, some members of the congregation were involved in a documented Underground Railroad site located near the present building.²⁴ This may account for the persistence of folklore that the present building was associated with the Underground Railroad, though the land was not acquired and the building was not built until after the Civil War.

While the Bethel AME building served as a prominent Main Street symbol for an African American community that had arrived at a social status that drew the respect of much of the greater community,²⁵ sending out a message of permanence, stability, and cohesiveness, the slow completion of the building, on the other hand, actually represents that "behind the scenes" there were a few additional turns on a "rocky road" toward those goals. After the shell of the building had been completed, and before the interior was finished, several families connected to the Bethel AME congregation withdrew to establish Second Baptist Church in 1882, and built a building for the new congregation in 1883 near the center of the Fair Street neighborhood. While establishment of a second African American congregation of a different denominational background suggests a move toward acceptance of diversity, it apparently occurred at a time when the community could not quite support two churches. Although some local African American families may have been of Baptist background prior to their coming here, the only African American church in the town had always been AME, and the church was up to that point the undisputed center of the Black community. The move to establish Second Baptist took several key families out of the Bethel AME membership. The split not only stressed the ability of the local African American community to complete the 1871 building, but it also foreshadowed emerging trends in a constantly evolving social situation. While the 1860s and 1870s represent a kind of "golden era" for Monongahela City as the town received its official city charter, nearly tripled in population, and saw the construction of many new buildings in a cohesive fabric that reflected the town's maturation, the 1880s were threshold to the era of the Second Industrial Revolution in the Pittsburgh area. From 1880 to 1920, there was constant immigration of new ethnic groups into the industrial neighborhoods of the Pittsburgh area. With this growth came less openness to racial equality than was typical in the pre-1880 microcosmic society of Monongahela City, though industrialization also brought some alternating periods of improvement in the situation. In 1883, the population was perhaps too small to support two African American churches, while by the 1910s, with the influx in African Americans in the Great Migration, the community saw a need for a second African American Baptist church (Ebenezer Baptist, established 1917). In the 1890s, in the economic and social turmoil of these decades, the interior of the Bethel AME building was completed. This may have been a brief period of stability for local AME members. In 1891, for instance, Monongahela had a Bethel AME member serving on city council.²⁶

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After the completion of the present Bethel AME building in 1894, the prominently-sited Main Street church not only symbolized the African American community to the rest of the town, but it also came to represent some stratification with the African American population. The congregation tended to be the church home of the oldest African American families in the area. As such, it was both an architectural and sociological "middle ground" where the city's white residents became acquainted with a sector of the Black population. Tenure in the area and social status gave Bethel families an edge over many of the newer families represented in the city's two African American Baptist churches. Any sociological edge the congregation had may have been a factor in the unusual success of a large number college-bound young people who came out of this congregation in the 1940s through the 1970s. Bethel AME families sent their sons and daughters to many of the best colleges across the country, including most of the colleges represented in the Ivy League.

The choice of West Main and Seventh Streets as a location for Bethel AME's 1871 building reflects both a link to the African American neighborhood that was just a couple of blocks southeast of this corner, and a bold move to build an African American church on Main Street. From about 1807 through the 1850s, Monongahela City functioned as two villages, Williamsport laid out in 1792 by Parkison, and Georgetown laid out a few blocks down river (west) by Adam Wickerham in 1807 on an adjoining farm. Georgetown ended a block or two east of the present Bethel AME site. Joseph Taylor Armstrong's account of Monongahela in the era of the Underground Railroad makes it clear that in the 1850s African Americans were unwelcome, even threatened when delivering newspapers, in the upriver end of town, the original village of Williamsport.²⁷ The corridor along Sixth Street (originally called Fair Street) and several cross streets, at the southwestern corner of the original Georgetown plan, was largely a neighborhood of Free Blacks. The first building built for Bethel AME was at the core of this neighborhood. The present Bethel AME building, a block or two northwest of the nearest African American households, continued the church's role as the educational, religious, and social focal point of this neighborhood, even though it was a block away from it. The two other African American churches built subsequently were built within the neighborhood: Second Baptist Church, built 1883 and closed about 1969 (the building was recently demolished),²⁸ and Ebenezer Baptist Church, which still occupies a two-story brushed red brick building built in 1917. Second Baptist was more closely tied sociologically to Bethel, having a number of families in its membership who had once belonged to Bethel, while Ebenezer Baptist was made up more of new families who came to the area later to work in the coal mines and other industries.²⁹ The parcel chosen 1868 for the present Bethel AME Church building had previously been part of a large fairgrounds that extended out of the little borough to the west on what had been the Wickerham farm.³⁰ In order to purchase this parcel, even though it was outside the borough limits, the congregation had to arrange for a white citizen to buy it and sell it back to them.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Bethel AME was built during the greatest building boom in Monongahela City's history.³¹ Essentially a small proto-industrial village in the 1810s, Monongahela City became a borough in 1837 when it was a major stop on the Glades Road, a short cut between the original Forbes Road and the National Road. The borough experienced a growth spurt in the late 1830s, followed by a minor spurt in the 1850s when it was an important boatbuilding center. In the 1870s, however, the borough's population nearly tripled in a very short period of time, during a great developmental boom, spurred on by the construction of the first railroad up the river valley. The railroad was NPS

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completed to Monongahela City in 1873.³² Construction of the railroad ceased for about a decade shortly after it reached Monongahela City due to the Jay Cooke Panic, which bankrupted the railroad company. However, Monongahela City continued to flourish well into the Panic, perhaps due to the new rail service. In 1873 alone, 130 new houses were built in the town,³³ and that same year the borough received a city charter from the state legislature.

The buildings of the 1870s boom were built primarily by three or four local planing mills. One of these, called Valley Mills, was owned by John Blythe, a local builder and architect. The attribution of Bethel AME to John Blythe comes from an 1872 article in the *Monongahela Valley Republican* (weekly newspaper), describing a new commercial block then under construction at the center of town. The paragraph mentioning the church reads as follows:

"The plans are from the hands of our young citizen and architect, Mr. JOHN BLYTHE. We esteem ourselves fortunate in having a gentleman of such capability amongst us,—a genius which is finding abundant practice in developing the architectural beauty of our city and cultivating the tastes of our people. We point with pride to the Presbyterian, A.M.E. and Baptist Churches, to Messrs. Bowman's, Taylor's, Abrams', Longwell's, Hazzard's, Legler's, and other fine buildings, and we know they are better and finer than they might have been, because Mr. Blythe has contributed his advice and skill and taste toward their erection. Architecture has been called "frozen music," and our friend holds in the highest dignity his art, which he has mastered comparatively well, having achieved success, so far, in whatever he has undertaken, and his friends believe, that with known earnestness and application, he will accomplish a name in the profession to which he is so enthusiastically devoted."³⁴

John Blythe's career began as a carpenter in the 1860s, when he moved to Monongahela City from nearby Bentleyville, where he was born ca.1839. His brother James had practiced carpentry in Monongahela City beginning in 1851, but had returned to the farm in 1859. In 1865, John Blythe and Charles E. Beach purchased a steam-powered planing mill that stood along the river, about two blocks east of the church.³⁵ The earliest mention of Blythe in local records is in 1864 when he was one of sixteen men appointed to the building committee for the First Methodist Church. Subsequently, this committee hired Joseph C. Hoxie of Philadelphia to design a large new building.³⁶ The first major departure from plain Greek Revival vernacular in the Monongahela City area, it was a simplified version of the design Hoxie had prepared for First Presbyterian Church of York in 1860. Although no formal records exist about Blythe's relationship with Hoxie, by the time Hoxie's design was completed, nine years later, Blythe was being referred to as an "architect" in the local paper and had at least three churches, four commercial buildings, and five brick houses under construction.³⁷ The commercial buildings and houses were in the Italianate style, while Blythe's churches were Gothic Revival in style and Hoxie's First Methodist Church was in the German Romanesque Revival style. Blythe's career declined during the Jay Cooke Panic (especially after an 1875 fire that destroyed his planing mill), and he briefly re-emerged in the 1880s, mostly as a contract builder. In 1880, he contracted to build two rows of eight miners houses at Broadford, Henry Clay Frick's first mining town,³⁸ and by 1886, he had built sixteen houses in Homestead, Pa. (site of the 1892 Homestead Strike).³⁹ In July 1888, the planing mill was again destroyed, this time by flood, and Blythe designed and built his last known residential design in 1889, the Mrs. James Kerr House, a stylistically-modest eight room addition to an 1830s house. The Kerr house is directly across West Main Street from Bethel AME and next to the Taylor House.⁴⁰ Blythe died in 1901 at age sixty-two.

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The Bethel AME congregation had a difficult time finishing the interior of this building. One of the church's history booklets indicates that the interior of the sanctuary was not finished until 1894.⁴¹ During this time period, Second Baptist Church was founded, and the departure of several key families made the completion more difficult.

BETHEL AME COMPARED TO OTHER LOCAL GOTHIC REVIVAL STYLE CHURCHES

The Bethel AME Church building compares favorably to other Gothic Revival style churches in Monongahela City. It is one of about five Gothic Revival style buildings in the city.

Only one Gothic Revival church building in the city is older than the Bethel AME building, St. Paul's Episcopal Church on West Main Street between First and Second Streets, about five blocks east of the Bethel AME site. St. Paul's Episcopal is a stone building with a simple, pointed-arched openings and a Main Street facade dominated by a tower. The stonework at St. Paul's was largely done by the congregants when the building was built in 1865.⁴² The church is similarly detailed to Bethel AME, using Gothic Revival features characteristic of the 1860s and 1870s, and like Bethel, it is a modest rendition of this style. In fact St. Paul's is perhaps a little smaller in size and has less integrity. The center tower at the facade of St. Paul's originally had a wood steeple, similar to that at the Bethel AME building, but with less detailing. However, early twentieth century photographs show that the steeple was not plumb,⁴³ and about 1925, it was removed altogether, as were steeples on several other Monongahela City church buildings. St. Paul's is on a hillside site, originally with a monumental set of steps rising from Main Street up a steeply-embanked lawn to the front entrance. About 1990, these steps were replaced by a large concrete ramp structure with stone facing. The architect of St. Paul's is not known. It is possible, perhaps likely, that John Blythe was involved at some level in the project, but no documentation has been found indicating that Blythe served as architect on any buildings built prior to 1868 or 1869.⁴⁴

At First Presbyterian, however, John Blythe was the architect.⁴⁵ First Presbyterian is located at the corner of Sixth and West Main Streets, about a block east of the Bethel AME building. The First Presbyterian Church building was built at exactly the same time as Bethel AME building. It's design is almost identical to Bethel AME's in the main layout of the floor plan and in the massing, but it is larger than the Bethel AME building in width and depth, has a partial second tower on Main Street. Each feature of the First Presbyterian Church has a little more flourish than the corresponding feature at the Bethel AME building. For instance, the steep roof has small gabled ventilators spaced at the same interval as the side windows of the sanctuary, the steeple has more stages, and the door and window openings have stone trim. The ornamental trusses in the sanctuary and the tracery dividing the stained glass windows also have more pieces and shapes to them than those found at the Bethel AME building. The First Presbyterian Church building has a roughly equal level of integrity to that of the Bethel AME building, except that two Sunday School additions were built at the rear of the church around 1907 and 1920.

Next to Bethel AME is Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church, a 1908 Gothic Revival style design by Pittsburgh architect John Comas who designed many other Catholic churches in the Pittsburgh area. It is a very different kind of Gothic Revival style interpretation as it uses a variety of ornamental features and motifs peculiar to the early twentieth century, such as yellow brick interior wall surfaces and some terra cotta ornamentation in place of stone in the red brick facade. Transfiguration had two steeples until they were removed in 1925 when one was struck by lightning.

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Although the comparison of the Bethel AME Church building to the First Presbyterian Church building provides evidence of a radical difference in financial means between the two congregations, especially considering that the two buildings were built at the same time by the same architect, some have found the Bethel AME building to be a purer example of the Gothic Revival style than the First Presbyterian building. Eminent Pittsburgh architectural historian James D. Van Trump commented to this effect when writing up survey forms on the two buildings in 1973. Van Trump, however, did not know that the two buildings had the same architect and may have perhaps commented differently had that information been available to him. The \$12,000 budget for the present Bethel AME placed it well *below* the \$35,000 spent on the First Presbyterian Church building and the \$45,000 spent on the First Methodist Church building, but notably well *above* the \$7,000 spent by First Baptist Church, a white congregation, on a frame building built at the same (demolished ca. 1980). John Blythe designed and largely built the Presbyterian, Baptist, and AME church buildings and served on the building committee of the First Methodist Church. All three buildings of the buildings Blythe designed went under construction around 1870, though the Methodist church (which Blythe did not design) had been started in 1864. The Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist church buildings were completed by 1874.

MINOR CHANGES THROUGH TIME

From the 1890s to the present, very few changes have been made to the Bethel AME church building. The congregation has kept it in good repair, and most changes have been restricted to the basement. Bethel AME served the community at large for many years as the host of a community dinner held annually on Election Day. Gradually, this event gave way to an annual Fall Bazaar and Antique Sale. The bazaar, held each October, is well-established and regionally-known. From its proceeds, the congregation has been able to make improvements, particularly to the basement, including installation of a concrete outside stairwell, excavation of areas under the Sanctuary that were previously unexcavated for classrooms, and installation of a stairwell from the Sanctuary into these areas, panelling of a basement area as a pastor's study, and similar improvements. Bethel AME continues to be an important focal point, particularly of the older African American families of the Monongahela Valley. Closure of AME churches in several neighboring towns has brought other families into the congregation representing a larger circle, although the membership remains small.⁴⁶

In September, 1987, the steeple of Bethel AME Church was destroyed by lightning in an early morning electrical storm. Over the years, the steeple design had been simplified in the process of re-roofing it. The new steeple has a steel frame and incorporates a lightning rod, but otherwise the four-part construction matches the original design exactly as shown in Caldwell's *Atlas of Washington County* (1876).⁴⁷ The reconstruction made it possible for the church to place a bell in the belfry for the first time. The bell, cast in 1837, is said to have been the first bell brought to the town.⁴⁸

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ENDNOTES

1. See "The Central Block of Buildings," *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 26 September 72. This article lists ten Blythe buildings; others are in other articles. Blythe built numerous buildings in Monongahela City around 1870 several of which closely resemble patterns published about the same time in Bicknell's *Village Builder*. Some of them are of exactly the same design as the buildings shown in the book, though the drawings in question are of buildings located in other states. Bicknell's *Village Builder*, like some other patternbooks of the era, is a compilation of drawings of existing buildings by other architects. Generally, Blythe's buildings are older than the designs shown in the earliest known edition of Bicknell's by a year or two, which suggests that there was either an earlier edition of the book, or perhaps that Blythe had access to drawings published later by Bicknell.
2. Although a simplified vernacular variation on the nineteenth century's Gothic Revival, this may be the highest-style Gothic church built by an African American congregation in the greater Pittsburgh area in the decade following the Civil War. Several other AME congregations in Washington County and in the Greater Pittsburgh area inherited buildings built by other denominations. In a few cases, AME congregations have recently built new buildings. As a result, this church is rare both as an early construction project undertaken by an AME congregation and as a survivor. Only seven or eight AME congregations were ever formed in this county, and this is the highest-style church built by any of them.
3. There are no known buildings associated with the Monongahela City African American community that predate this building. Although the Fair Street (now known as Sixth Street) neighborhood has been largely African American in make-up since before the Civil War, it now contains only a few buildings built before 1900. At best there may be a private residence or two still standing from the nineteenth century, though no such buildings are known to exist with any integrity to represent the nineteenth century activities of this community.
4. The two oldest AME congregations in western Pennsylvania are St. Paul AME, founded 1818 (two years after the denomination was formally organized at the national level) and Bethel AME of Pittsburgh, founded 1827. The Payne Chapel congregation of Canonsburg was founded the same year as this church.
5. Bell, "List of Slave Owners in Washington County, Pa, 1782."; Crumrine's *History of Washington County*, 257, quotes a special law passed in 1782 by the state assembly to confirm that the Gradual Abolition Act includes Washington County, because the county was not formed until 1781, and in neighboring Westmoreland County, citing Virginia influence in the political culture of the local area.
6. Bell, "List of Slave Owners in Washington County, Pa, 1782."
7. Woodson, *Freed Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830*.
8. Creigh, *History of Washington County*, 247, says 1833; Crumrine, *History of Washington County*, 588, says 1834.
9. Bethel AME was one of only two AME churches started in the eastern half of the county before 1890. The other, Little Zion AME of Centerville, closed many years ago and the frame building in 1881 is believed to have been demolished, though the church's graveyard is still in existence. After 1890, when Charleroi was established 5 miles south of Monongahela City, an AME Church (St. James) was established which was in existence there for many years, but has since closed (the building is still standing). The other AME churches were in central Washington County (Washington and Canonsburg), plus one in West Middletown in western Washington County.
10. VanVoorhis, *The Old and New Monongahela*, 83-85.
11. VanVoorhis, *The Old and New Monongahela*, 97.
12. France, *Monongahela Area 200th Anniversary Souvenir Book*, pages 50, 137.
13. VanVoorhis, *The Old and New Monongahela*, 107.
14. France, *Monongahela Area 200th Anniversary Souvenir Book*, 137, 191; Captain William Catlin, a barber of one of the middle generations of the Catlin family and a Civil War veteran, was a one-time candidate for the legislature, though unsuccessful. George Catlin, his nephew, practiced barbering until about 1980, retiring from a career of over 80 years.

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15. It appears to have been a deeply entrenched tradition for white congregations to hand down (or sell) buildings and other items, when they no longer needed them, to AME churches. As a result, a number of the historic AME congregations in the area are housed in "hand-me-down" buildings that give the false impression that the building was built by the congregation. The historic AME Church in the West Middletown Historic District [NR 1984] is an example. It was originally built for a Disciples of Christ congregation. The present Calvary AME Church building in Braddock, Pa. (originally a Presbyterian Church), is another example. Another was the former building of St. Paul AME Church in Washington, Pa. (demolished ca.1990). Though St. Paul AME Church is the oldest AME congregation in western Pennsylvania, it was housed for over 100 years in a large church building built in the 1870s by a white Methodist congregation who had outgrown it and rebuilt again shortly after the building's construction. By contrast to these examples, Bethel AME's building is a reflection of the strength of the congregation in the post-Civil War era, rather than a reflection of that of some other congregation. It is an unusual example of a building of relatively sophisticated architectural design built by an AME congregation.

16. Crumrine, *History of Washington County*, 588. Crumrine's says the basement of the earlier Bethel AME Church building was completed in 1849 and the second story was completed in 1858, a similar staged construction situation to the construction of the present building. By 1882, when Crumrine's *History* was published, the old building was a dwelling occupied by Charles Jones. The Jones family lived in the building almost a hundred years before it was torn down.

17. Washington County is geographically an important crossroads of many social and cultural patterns affecting attitudes toward race and slavery. Prior to the Civil War, southeastern Washington County had a sizable Quaker community, several key members of which were heavily involved in the Underground Railroad. (Most of the Quaker community relocated to Ohio by 1870, with the remaining families converting to other faiths as all the local meetings were closing). The town of Washington, Pa., was an early center of both the Abolition and Colonization movements. Sometimes, the two movements were at odds with each other. The county also had a strong connection to Virginia dating from the 1770s when Virginia established several courthouses in the area. There was lingering anti-Pennsylvania sentiment among families who had once allied themselves with the Virginia government, which fed into a growing Copperhead movement during to the Civil War. The proximity of Virginia, both to the west and south, prior to the war, was another important factor, as there were mixed loyalties among families with interests on both sides of the state line and as the proximity also made the county a likely conduit for escaping slaves passing through what is now West Virginia. In the original settlement of the county, there were at least three or four distinctly different church denominations within the Presbyterian branch of Protestantism, and the leaders of these groups took differing views on slavery and abolition. The Methodists in the county split into about four different denominations during the Civil War era, partly over slavery, in patterns that relate to the above-stated geographic factors. When Rev. Samuel Gould gave several public speeches in the county in June and July 1836 in Washington and Monongahela City, the local communities broke out into riots over his presence. Dr. F.J. LeMoynne, of Washington, who helped facilitate Gould's controversial presentations later became a prominent Abolitionist, though also fought against the Colonization movement. The county had an unusually rich, mixed heritage with regard to these inter-related movements.

18. Segregation versus integration in the local schools was a subject of lively debate in Carroll Township School Board records in the 1850s (Carroll Township surrounded Monongahela City on three sides at this time). In West Columbia (present site of Donora), about five miles east of Monongahela City, the policy on integration was reversed at least once prior to the public education law of 1854 which provided for education of African Americans. Prior to 1854, though, African American children in Monongahela City were taught at the former Bethel AME Church building in a special school initiative created in 1836 with a white teacher. Although education of African Americans was considered a responsibility of the public schools by the time of the 1871 construction of the present building, there was still a segregated school in the area as late as 1870. As integration came into effect, the Bethel AME congregation continued to recognize its role, formerly as the only school for African American students, and subsequently as a supplemental form of instruction to assure as much of a chance for equal opportunity as possible for its members and others African American members of the community.

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19. Bethel AME has held many social events over the years, and many of these served a cultural and secular purpose rather than a religious one. An example was a kind of meeting frequently advertised in the local newspapers in the nineteenth century as "Bush Meetings."

20. Beyond the meetings that occurred within the local African American community, the AME churches across the county and region organized a number of activities targeted at helping their young, single members meet others of the same age. Joint social events were held with the AME church in West Middletown, for instance, which is 30 miles northwest of Monongahela City, according to Gwendolyn Simmons, a local historian who belongs to the Bethel AME congregation. One fairly-well-documented example of a joint activity was the formation of Company F, a unit that served in the Civil War. When Company F was first coming into being, there were not enough young African American men in either Monongahela City or nearby Elizabeth, Pa. to form an independent unit, so the young men of the two communities joined forces. At the time, Governor Curtin turned them down for active service because Pennsylvania, by policy, was refusing all African American troops. However, the group continued to hold regular exercises in one or the other town hoping the governor would change the policy. As the war escalated, the governor drafted several individuals in the unit not knowing they were African Americans, and as a result, the policy was changed and Company F went off to battle. See Jones, William H., "The Colored Soldiers" *Centennial Anniversary of the Founding of Monongahela City, Pa.*, 1895, pages 175-181.

21. The local newspaper editor gave almost equal coverage to the Bethel AME construction project as he covered all the churches under construction at the same time. *The Monongahela Valley Republican* carried fifteen or sixteen indepth articles on construction of local churches in the eight year period from 1868 to 1876. Every topic from the architectural history of Norman and Gothic details to the variation in floor plan requirements of different denominations to the skills of local architects to the source of bricks is covered in these stories. Some of the articles are commentaries that were first published in newspapers from other towns paying compliments to Monongahela City's progress which were subsequently reprinted in the Monongahela paper. For example, one article, quoted in 1875 from *The Pittsburgh Elevator*, said:

"Monongahela City ... Slowly and steadily...has advanced, till it has now become one of the finest and wealthiest cities on the Monongahela river... But its wealth alone is not its greatness. Its progressive spirit, Christian, Political, and Commercial enterprises is what strikes the traveller with such astonishment as he surveys its ever widening borders: as he casts his eye upward he beholds with admiration the magnificent spires shooting up from the domes of four magnificent churches which the inhabitants look upon with pleasure; and Main Street alone can boast of her seven churches as Rome did her seven hills.

Conspicuous among these stands the new and beautiful A.M.E. Church which for style and beauty is without a rival this side of the Allegheny mountains. Surely the spirit of elevation has pervaded the hearts of the colored people. This church will stand for ages as a monument of honor to the enterprise of its members. But don't let the traveller expect, when visiting this place, that he will meet with an excess of fashion and haughtiness, which generally characterizes such advancement. The contrary is true, they are plain, quiet, courteous and religious people."

In general, in these articles, Bethel Bethel AME gets a little less attention than the two or three larger churches under construction at the same time, but is frequently cited in articles that cover the various building projects as a group. Editor Chillion W. Hazzard apparently felt enough rapport with his African American neighbors to make a pun when the other churches had announced their dedication ceremonies and Bethel AME was lagging far behind, in saying that the congregation was keeping the rest of the town "in the dark" on the subject. While this may strike the modern reader as a comment carrying racist overtones, in the context at the time of the series of articles Hazzard ran about the various buildings under construction, it is clearly an indication that he was trying to cover them equally and was frustrated at the slower progress at Bethel AME.

22. Caldwell's *Atlas of Washington County* (1876) page 177.

23. See: *One Hundred Forty-Sixth Anniversary/Homecoming, Bethel AME Church*, 1979.

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24. For the best overview of Underground Railroad activity in the Monongahela City, see the eyewitness account by Joseph Taylor Armstrong in *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*. ("My Boyhood Days in Monongahela," letter by Joseph Armstrong Taylor), 136-150. See also Wallace, Howard, *Historical Sketch of the Underground Railroad from Uniontown to Pittsburgh*. Wallace's account is the only book published as an eyewitness account by an African American participant in the Underground Railroad. Wallace lived in Centerville, about fifteen miles south of Monongahela City. He tells of sending slaves north in the direction of Monongahela City, where a number of his cousins were members of Bethel AME Church. Wallace's account is also the only one of about a dozen local eyewitness accounts that tells of enough different stations to get a sense of the overall routes. Centerville was the original center of a Quaker community that later extended across county lines until it included about twelve meetings in four counties. Several Bethel AME families are descended from the Smith family of Centerville, of which Howard Wallace was also a member. The Smith family had settled in the Centerville area well before the Revolution. See Bolden, "The Smith-Simmons Family 1728-," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 March 1950 and *Southwestern Pennsylvania Magazine*, Volume IV.

25. Through decades of changing social mores with regard to race, equality, segregation vs. integration, racism, and civil rights, the Bethel AME congregation has been regarded as an important institution on roughly equal standing with dozens of other churches and ethnic institutions in the area. Monongahela City historically has been a community divided into many groups, including an unusually high number of clubs and fraternal lodges and several different enclaves of Italians and eastern Europeans who built churches and fraternal institutions of their own. Historically, there may have been more episodes reflecting prejudice against Italian immigrants and Roman Catholics than those targeted at African Americans. However, racial parity has still been difficult in the community for various reasons. Yet it appears that the physical presence of this building on Main Street has helped to remind the greater community of this congregation's long history of community involvement, thus providing some continuity through all the changes in African American social status over the last 150 years.

26. See Necciai, "The Monongahela Black Community." *Southwestern Pennsylvania Magazine*, Volume IV. California Pennsylvania: The Museum of Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1984, page 50. Traditionally, the county office of Jury Commissioner was held in Washington County by African Americans. For many years, this office was held by members of the Simmons family.

27. Taylor, *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*, 149.

28. Taylor, *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*, 128.

29. Keyes and Necciai, *Historic Site Survey of the Greater Monongahela Valley*.

30. Taylor, *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*, 138.

31. Numerous articles in the *Monongahela Valley Republican* between 1868 and 1875 document this building boom during which the population of the town almost tripled. Census figures for the town rose from 1,078 in 1870 to 2,904 in 1880.

32. Crumrine, *History of Washington County*, 397.

33. *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 8 January 1874.

34. *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 26 September 1872.

35. Crumrine, *History of Washington County*, 579.

36. *First United Methodist Church, Monongahela, Pennsylvania, 150th Anniversary*, 1963; Dickson, *One Hundred Pennsylvania Buildings*, figure 63. According to Philadelphia architectural historian Richard Webster, who has researched Joseph Hoxie and his partner S.D. Button, the German Romanesque buildings produced by this firm in the mid nineteenth century were actually designed by S.D. Button. However, Hoxie was apparently the only representative of the firm to visit Monongahela City and to make enough of an impact for his name to have made it into local historical records. The Monongahela Area Historical Society has a small photograph made about 1870 of a drawing of the facade of this church, perhaps the original drawing Hoxie and Button prepared. The same collection also contains a small photograph of a facade drawing of First Presbyterian Church, one of John Blythe's designs. The two drawings are very similar in style.

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37. *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 26 September 1872.
38. *Monongahela Valley Republican*, April 1880.
39. *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 23 June 1886.
40. Drawings and specifications for the Mrs. James Kerr House are in the possession of the present owner, Anna McKean Wescott Whitlatch, 717 West Main Street, Monongahela City.
34. Bicknell, *Bicknell's Village Builder and Supplement*, plates 39-44.
41. *One Hundred Forty-Sixth Anniversary/Homecoming, Bethel AME Church*, page 3. See also France, *Monongahela Area 200th Anniversary Souvenir Book*, page 138, where the following passage is quoted from an 1895 edition of the *Monongahela Valley Republican*: "[for the dedication of the building in 1895] fully 2,000 negroes were in Monongahela, the largest gathering of the sort ever in town... All hotels were overflowing with guests. Hotel keepers, without prejudice, entertained as many as possible."
42. The information on the stonework at St. Paul's Episcopal Church being done by the members of the congregation comes from an anniversary book on the history of the congregation, on file at the Monongahela Area Historical Society.
43. The out-of-plumb angle of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church steeple is recorded in many historical photographs of the church on file at the Monongahela Area Historical Society. A photograph taken from one of the angles at which it appeared to be plumb in 1908 can be seen in: Taylor, *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*, page 125.
44. The first mention of a member of the Blythe family serving as "architect" of a local church building in the *Monongahela Valley Republican* appears in 1868 with regard to Newkirk's Methodist Church at the edge of Bentleyville, a small town near Monongahela City where the family lived prior to moving into the city. That reference says "James Blythe" (John Blythe's brother and business partner), but it is the only time that James was ever referred to in the local newspaper as an architect, and may have been an error, as the building is closely related to several of the projects John Blythe was credited as having designed in numerous newspaper articles beginning about 1869.
45. John Blythe was the architect of the First Presbyterian Church building, a block east of the Bethel AME Church building, as well as the First Baptist Church building then located across the street from First Presbyterian. However, First Presbyterian is the only institution located in a building designed by Blythe in Monongahela City that has consistently credited him as architect publications on their history.
46. Bethel AME's congregation grew in number with the closing of St. James AME Church in Charleroi. Some former members of Second Baptist also small settlement of African American farm families that once surrounded the now-closed Little Zion AME Church in Centerville.
47. Caldwell, *Atlas of Washington County*, page 177
48. See: Taylor, *Historical Magazine of Monongahela's Old Home Coming Week*, page 70, and "Old Carriage Factory Bell," *Monongahela Valley Republican*, 9 July 1883. The bell placed here in 1988 had formerly hung at Second Baptist Church. About 1985, the belfry of Second Baptist had been dismantled and the bell had been given to the Hilton family, former members of Second Baptist who are now members of Bethel AME. Previous to the construction of Second Baptist in 1883, the bell had hung in a factory building on West Main Street called the Old Carriage Factory, built in the 1830s, one of the first buildings built for a manufacturing purpose in the town. When it was torn down in 1883, the Old Carriage Factory Bell had been given to Second Baptist, which was then under construction. The Old Carriage Factory had served as an iron works, a school, a newspaper office, and in several other capacities. Its 1837 bell was the first bell in Monongahela City, used as the town's fire whistle, church bell, school bell, and factory bell for many years. The Hilton family donated the bell to Bethel AME, and it now hangs in the church's belfry.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Monongahela City
Washington County, Pennsylvania*

Section Number 9

Page 2

BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Monongahela City
Washington County, Pennsylvania*

Section Number 10

Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated parcel are shown on the attached site plan at a scale of 1" = 40'.

Boundary Justification

This parcel contains all the property associated with Bethel AME Church since its construction at this site, except the subdivided portion of the lot (city designation: Map 6 Lot 2; county designation: 440-06-00-16-01) containing the former parsonage, now a rental house, completely rebuilt at least twice and now completely sided in aluminum.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Bethel AME Church of Monongahela City
Washington County, Pennsylvania

Section photos Page 1

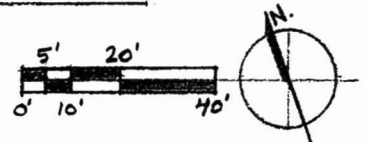
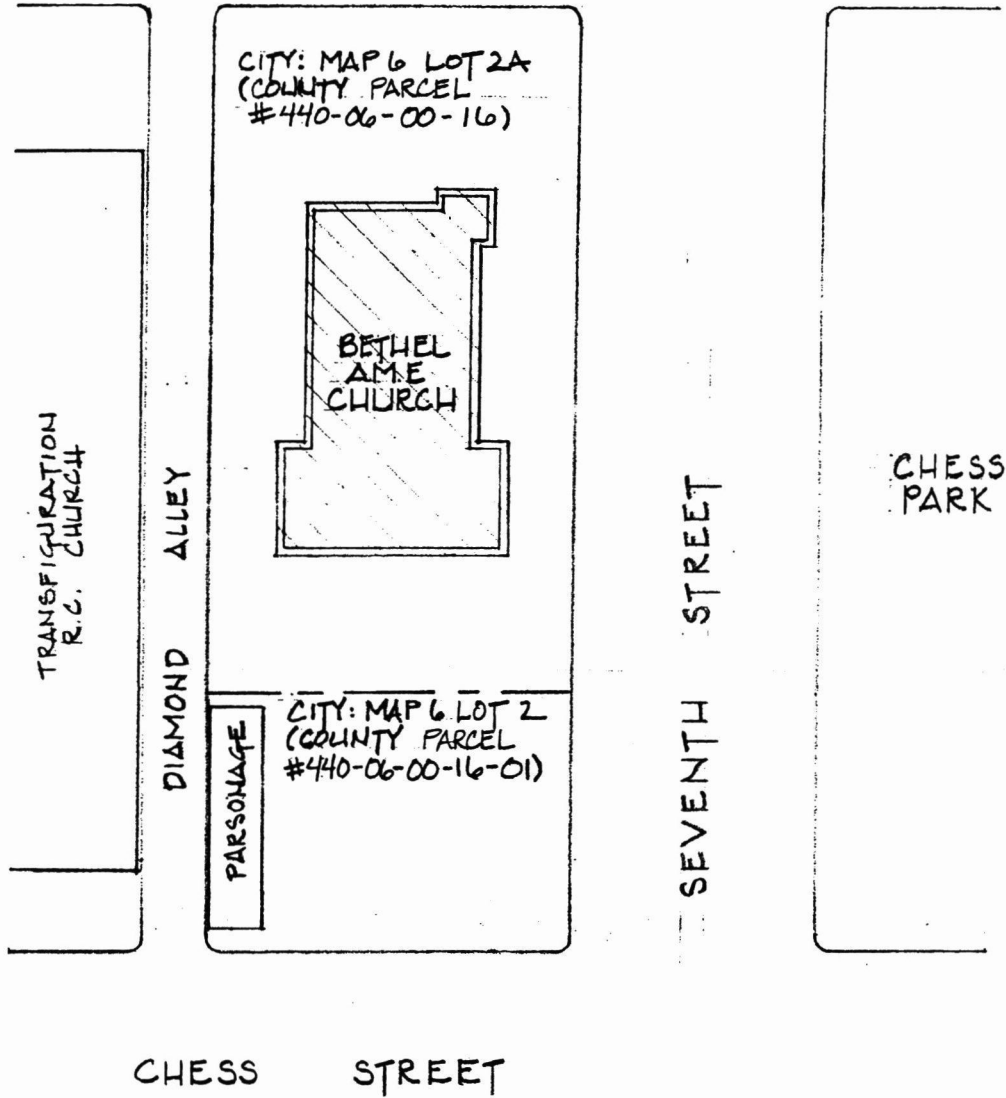
Photographs

Bethel AME Church of Monongahela City
Monongahela City

Terry Necciai
April 1994-August 1999
Negative Location: Office of Terry Necciai,
Historic Preservation Consulting
2334 Murray Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	DIRECTION
1.	Façade and Seventh Street Elevation	SW
2.	Façade and alley Elevation	S
3.	Chess St. and alley elevations	NE
4.	Chess and Seventh St. elevations	N
5.	Detail of restored steeple	N
6.	Detail of datestone	SW
7.	Chancel wall of sanctuary	SW
8.	Back of sanctuary looking from lecture room toward door to cellar	N
9.	Back of sanctuary, lloking into narthex	NE
10.	Detail of narthex doorway from sanctuary	E
11.	Detail of stained glass at back of sanctuary/interior of Main St. façade	NE
12.	Detail of 'Ladies Aid' Society memorial at Main St. façade stained glass	NE
13.	'Bethel AME' (reversed) stained glass in entrance transom from narthex	NE
14.	Sunday school (and dining) room looking toward kitchen and basement stairs	NW
15.	Sunday school (and dining) room looking toward Seventh St. entrance	SE
16.	Detail of interior reconstructed door and restored arch door	NE
17.	Detail of ventilation grill in Sunday school room ceiling	Up
18.	Basement looking through arch (below chancel wall) toward pastor's study	NE
19.	Basement looking through arch (below chancel wall) toward exterior entrance	SW
20.	Basement showing hallway excavated in 1980's and new concrete stairs	N
21.	Basement showing excavated and unexcavated areas near base of tower	S

WEST : MAIN



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH OF MONONGAHELA CITY, WASHINGTON CO., PA, SITE PLAN

TERRY A. NECCIAI, R.A.
HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONSULTING
2334 MURRAY AVENUE, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15217
412 521 4084

DATE: AUGUST 1999

SCALE: 1" = 40'

DRAWN BY: MZJ

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Bethel African American Episcopal Church of Monongahela City

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: PENNSYLVANIA, Washington

DATE RECEIVED: 9/27/02 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/15/02
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/31/02 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/11/02
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 02001298

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 11/7/02 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in the
National Register**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

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



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO NO 1

286 1411 N N N 34



BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO No 2

286 1411 NNN-2 4



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA

Photo No 3.

236 1411 NNN-2 4



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

MONONGAHELA CITY, PA

PHOTO No 4

286 1411 N N N 2 4



BETHEL AME Church
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
Photo No 5

286 1411 N N-2-4

A black and white photograph showing a stone plaque with the year "1871" carved into it. The plaque is set against a brick wall. To the right of the plaque, there is a large, dense, rounded bush or shrub. The image is framed by a white border.

1871

BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO NO 6

PTMNN1141 037



THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE

BETHEL A.M.E. Church

MONONGAHELA City, PA

Photo No 7

339 1411 N N N 1 4



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO NO. 8

288 1411 NNN 24



BETHEL AME CHURCH

MONONGAHELA CITY, PA

PHOTO No 9

389 1411 NNNW 4



BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO NO 10

389 1411 NNN-14



BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
Photo No 11

389 1411 NNN 24

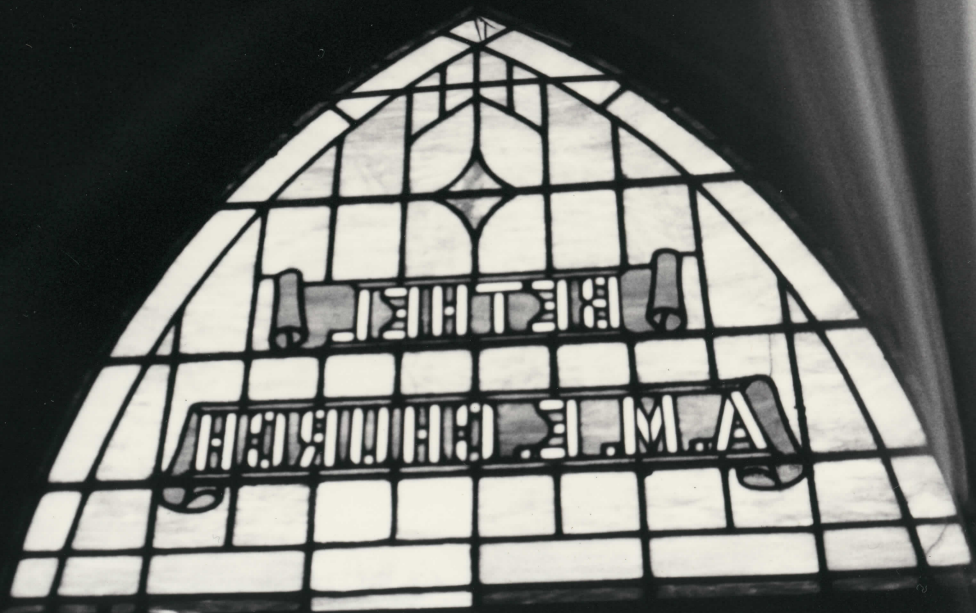


BETHEL AME Church

MONONGAHELA City, PA

Photo No 12

389 1411 NNN34



BETHEL A.M.E Church
Monongahela City, PA
Photo No 13

389 1411 NNN34



BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO No 14



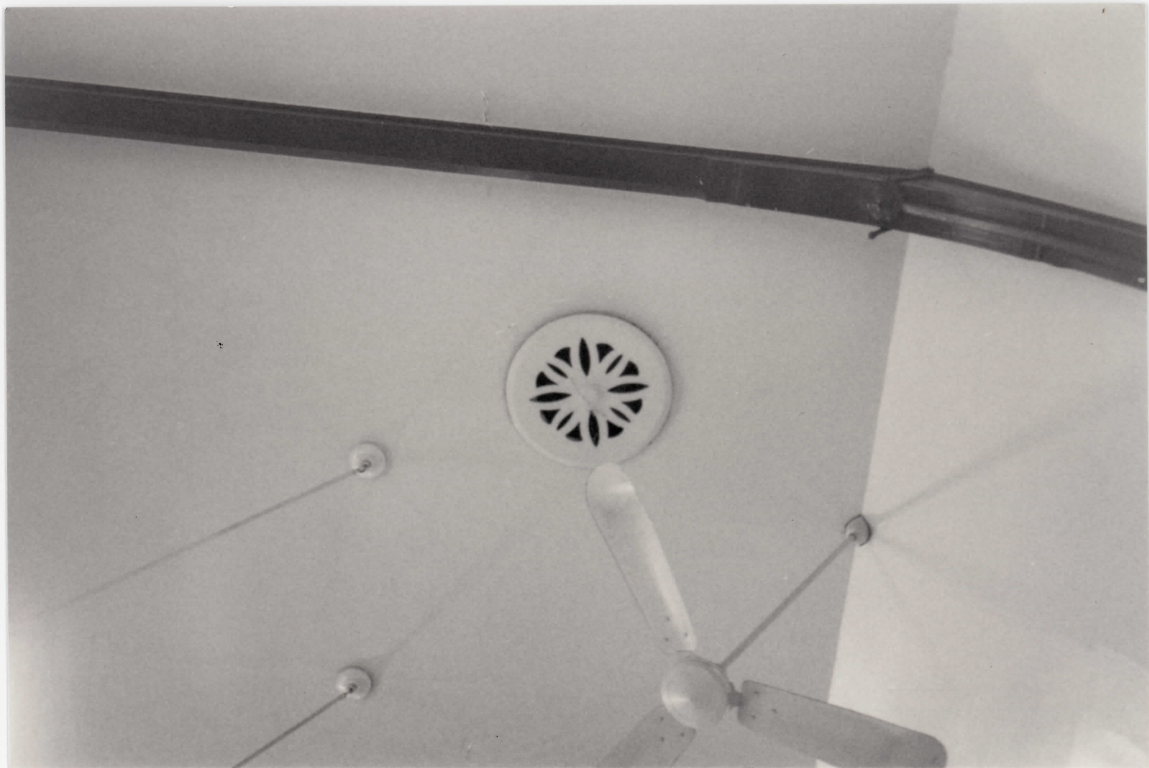
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MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO NO 15

290 1411 NNN 14



BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
PHOTO No 17 16

392 1411 NNNN 4



BETHEL AME Church
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
Photo No 1817

3921411NN54



BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MOUNONGAHELA CITY, PA
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BETHEL AME CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA

PHOTO NO 2019

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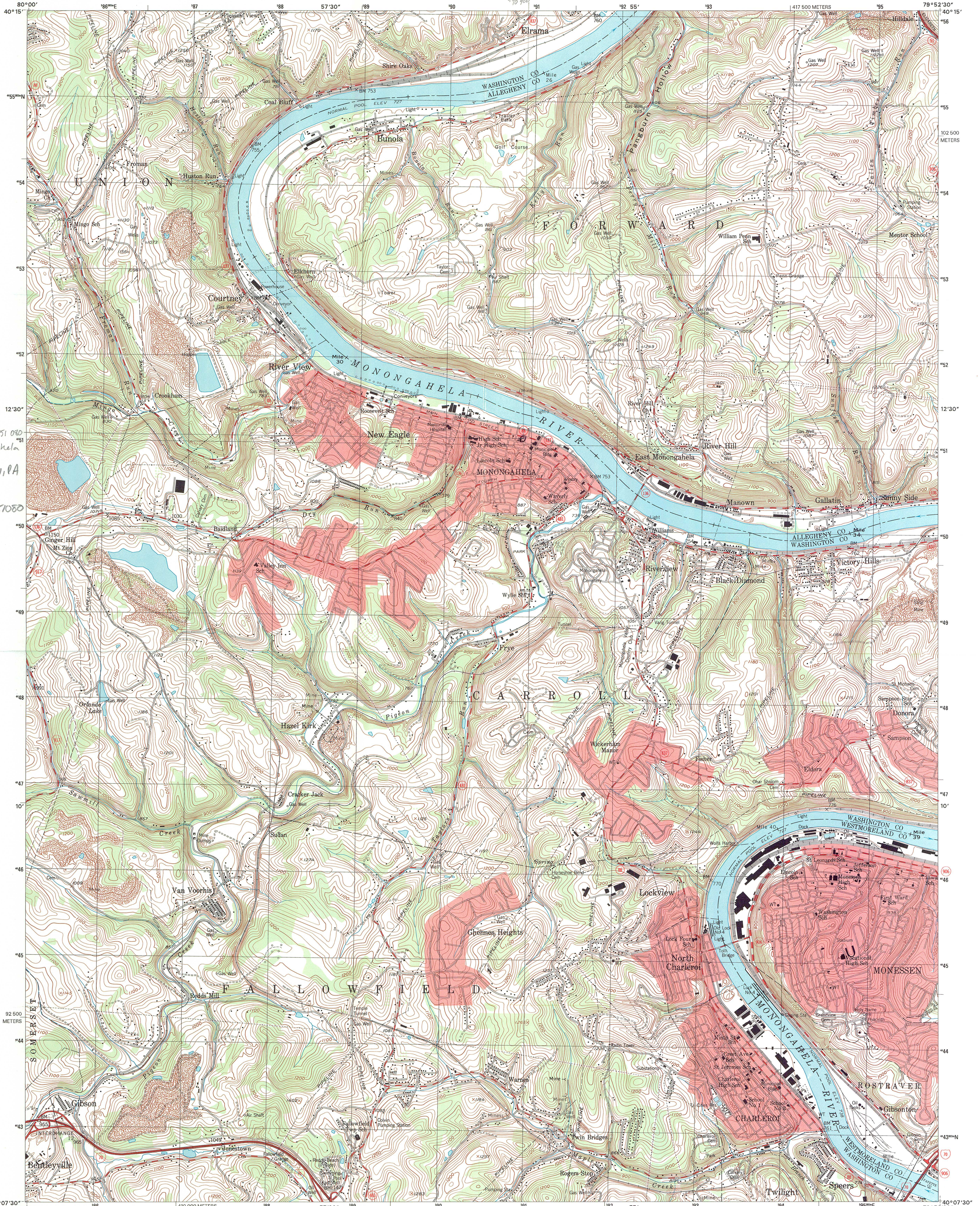
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MONONGAHELA City, PA
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BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH
MONONGAHELA CITY, PA
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266 1411 NNN 24



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Charon of Monongahela
City
Washington County, PA
UTM
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Produced by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Topographic and Geologic Survey

Topography compiled 1952. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1993 and other sources. Survey control current as of 1954

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 17 2500-meter ticks: Pennsylvania Coordinate System of 1983 (south zone)

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 83 and NAD 27 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software

Landmark buildings verified 1954

UTM GRID AND 1999 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24 000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC DATUM OF 1929
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048

FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

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

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

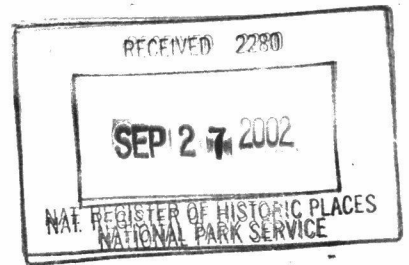
1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

1 Bridgetville
2 Glassport
3 McKeesport
4 Hackett
5 Donora
6 Elsworth
7 Callensia
8 Fayette City

MONONGAHELA, PA
1993
NIMA 5064 III NW-SERIES V831



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Bureau for Historic Preservation
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Floor
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093
www.phmc.state.pa.us



September 20, 2002

Carol Shull, Chief of Registration
National Register of Historic Places
U.S. Department of Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 "I" (Eye) Street, NW, 8th floor
Washington D.C. 20005

Re: NR nomination forms

Dear Ms. Shull:

The following National Register forms are being submitted for your review:

Bethel A.M.E. Church of Monongahela City
Monongahela City, Washington County, PA

The proposed action is :

listing in the National Register

determination of eligibility (owner objection)

If you have any questions regarding the nominations please call us at (717) 783-8947.

Sincerely,

Dan G. Deibler, Chief
Division of Preservation Services

Enclosures
DGD/zmp