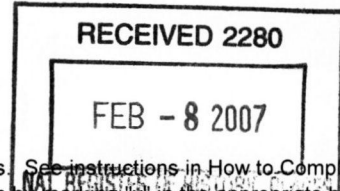


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. 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 and Parsonage

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 6 Sever Street N/A not for publication

city or town Plymouth N/A vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Plymouth code 023 zip code 02360

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Brona Simon

February 6, 2007

Signature of certifying official/Title Brona Simon, Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission, State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

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 certifying official/Title

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

Patricia Andrews

Date of Action

3/19/2007

Name of Property Bethel A.M.E. Church and Parsonage

County and State Plymouth, Massachusetts

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	building
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	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

RELIGION: Church related residence

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious facility

RELIGION: Church related residence

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY/GREEK REVIVAL/ITALIANATE

NO STYLE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE, BRICK

walls WOOD CLAPBOARD

roof ASPHALT SHINGLES

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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Continuation Sheet

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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DESCRIPTION

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church located at 6 Sever Street in Plymouth, Massachusetts is a small, 1½-story, wood frame, transitional Greek Revival and Italianate-style building. Constructed ca. 1840, the building was originally used for several purposes and was converted to a church in 1870. The church has a three-bay by three-bay rectangular block plan measuring approximately 32' x 45'. The church faces east and has a front-gable roof. Sited directly to the rear (west) of the church, is a 1½ story, wood frame, vernacular parsonage dwelling that was completed in 1895. Clad in clapboard, the parsonage has a rectangular three-bay by one-bay block plan with a side-gable roof. The main entrance is centered on the east (front) elevation. The buildings are in fair to good condition and although they have experienced a few changes since their construction, the style, form, and many architectural features remain preserved.

The Bethel AME Church is located in a dense residential neighborhood of modest 19th and early 20th-century houses, set on an elevated slope to the west of Plymouth's central business district and Main Street (Plymouth Village NRHD, 1982, also a LHD). The church and parsonage are sited on the uphill (west) side of a dead end residential street and occupy less than one acre of land that is modestly landscaped with grass and shrubs (**photo # 1**). The small lawn fronting the church is bordered by a concrete block retaining wall along with concrete stairs and a walkway leading to the main entrance. On the south property edge, a concrete paved driveway leads to the rear of the church and parsonage. Behind the parsonage at the rear of the lot is a small, fenced lawn with a few trees.

Bethel AME Church

The Bethel AME Church rests on a stone foundation covered with a skim coat of concrete. The building's timber frame is clad with clapboard and painted white. The gable roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles. Prominent stylistic features include Doric corner boards, a wide cornice, raking eaves, and end returns, as well as paired brackets in the eaves and at the tops of the corner pilasters, and single brackets above the façade windows (**photo #1**). The primary entrance is centered on the east façade and consists of replacement wood paneled double doors with a six-light glazed transom set in a simple wood surround. The entrance is sheltered by a gable-roof, wood porch supported on Doric columns with heavy carved brackets. A wood cross hangs above the porch in the gable peak. A basement door, added in the mid-20th century, is set in the east

(continued)

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

Section number 7 Page 2

façade foundation to the north of the main entrance porch and connects to a sloped red brick paved walkway that leads to the sidewalk. The rear entrance located in the southern bay on the west elevation has a replacement door with a 9/9 upper glass panel over a rectangular panel, and an exterior aluminum storm door. A short universal access ramp of wood with wood handrails leads to the rear entrance.

Fenestration consists of paired 4/1 double-hung wood sash windows on the façade flanking the main entrance, and individual 6/6 double-hung wood sash windows on the remaining elevations. The façade and south side elevation windows are set beneath a shallow hood supported by carved brackets, while the windows on the north side and rear have plain board surrounds. Wood shutters are hung on the outer side of the front elevation windows. All window openings have been fitted with exterior aluminum storm windows. Two rectangular board-and-batten doors on the upper story level in the rear (west) elevation lead to the attic area.

The Church's first floor interior sanctuary floor plan consists of 1,440 sq ft of open area. The sanctuary retains much of its original building envelope fabric and finishes, although most of the furnishings have been updated in the late 20th century. The original plaster walls have plain crown moldings and original horizontal wide board wainscoting that is painted white. The original plaster ceiling remains above dropped acoustical tile. Recent roof leaks have stained ceiling tiles in the northwest section of the sanctuary. A simple wood trim surrounds the windows and doors. A wood floor (condition unknown) is covered with linoleum tile installed prior to 1975.

The pulpit and chancel area, installed in the late 20th century, is located at the west end opposite the main entrance. The pulpit sits on a raised platform that is enclosed by a 4' tall wood railing, with plain balusters and taller corner posts with ball finial tops. **(photo #2)** Chairs for the ministry are located behind the pulpit and to the north side are the choir pews, the organ, and a lectern. The double rows of congregation pews in the sanctuary were obtained from another area church; however, the dark-stained wood chairs placed along the walls of the room are original to the founding of the church. Modern hanging glass bowl fixtures placed three across in two rows provide lighting.

By 1912, the property appears on a map as the Methodist Episcopal Church with a residential building (the parsonage) and a small outbuilding to the rear. The outbuilding was removed by 1927 (Sanborn 1912, 1919, 1927). In 1915-16 the foundation of the church was damaged during a flood and the church was raised and set on a new stone and concrete foundation. The stone wall bordering the front lawn, and the cement walk from the sidewalk to the church were added ca. 1919. In 1928, electric lights were installed in the buildings (Sims 1938:12, Olauson et al. 1998).

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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Other interior alterations occurred during the end of the 20th century to modernize mechanical systems, update the sanctuary, and provide community social space. These included the installation of central air conditioning and heating, and updating the electrical system. The church's basement level was excavated in 1980 to provide a fellowship hall for the congregation. The basement is accessed by a dogleg staircase at the southeast corner of the sanctuary. The basement walls are painted concrete block with four structural concrete block posts placed two on each side of the room and attached to the structural ceiling beams that run east and west. The kitchen area is located along the south side and two bathrooms are at the west end. The room is illuminated with basic light fixtures placed strategically throughout the room. The floor is concrete covered with linoleum tiles. The mechanical room and the exterior door leading to the street are at the east end on this level.

Parsonage

The Bethel AME Church Parsonage is a plain, vernacular, 1½-story, side-gable, late 19th century building with a small side ell on the north elevation (later addition). The building sits directly behind and approximately 20' from the church with a paved and grass area between the two buildings. **(photo #3)** The parsonage's main block sits on a low brick foundation, and the ell rests on a concrete block foundation. The building's timber frame is covered with clapboard and painted white with green trim at the narrow corner boards, eaves, and cornice. The side-gabled roof is sheathed in asphalt, and a red brick chimney is centered on the ridge of the roof. A skylight is centered on the west elevation, above the interior stairs.

The fenestration consists of single, 1/1 vinyl replacement double-hung sash windows. All windows are surrounded by a simple wood trim and fitted with exterior aluminum storm windows. The primary entrance (east elevation) leading into the building consists of a plain door with two small wood steps and an asphalt shingled, bracketed hood. The door has a 9/9 upper glass panel over a rectangular panel and is outfitted with an exterior aluminum storm door. The secondary entrance in the ell section has a simple three-panel aluminum door with simple wood surrounds.

The parsonage's interior plan consists of two primary rooms on each level. On the first floor an entry vestibule and a centered straight-run staircase divide the living room (south) and kitchen (north). A bathroom-utility area is located off the kitchen in the north ell. On the upper floor,

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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two bedrooms are located to either side of the small stair landing. The north is currently used as an office. The walls and ceiling in the living room are plaster with plain crown moldings. The door and window casings have bulls-eye corner blocks with simple wood surrounds, and the windows are encased in plain wood trim. In the remaining areas, the walls and ceilings are plaster. The room used as an office has a dropped acoustical ceiling and the stairway walls leading to the upper story are plywood paneled. Plain light fixtures affixed to the ceilings provide lighting for all rooms. The interior alterations include the construction of the ell to accommodate a bathroom and washroom/utility area, along with the upgrade of the heating and electrical systems. These modifications and the installation of the replacement windows are the changes made in the parsonage to bring its function into the 20th century.

In the approximately 167 years since its construction and in 136 years of continuous religious service, the Bethel AME Church and its parsonage experienced minor modifications that enabled the small campus to meet the growing needs of the congregation. These changes have preserved the buildings' relationship to one another, as well as their distinctive simple wood forms and modest architectural detailing.

Archaeological Description

While no ancient Native American sites are recorded on the church property, it is possible that sites are present. Eighteen ancient sites are recorded in the general area (within one mile). Environmental characteristics of the church property represent locational criteria (soil drainage, slope, proximity to wetlands) that are favorable for the presence of Native sites. Soil types in the area surrounding the church are listed as urban land and unclassified; however, it is likely that undisturbed soils were originally excessively drained coarse sands, typical of the pitted and dissected outwash plain characteristic of the area. Both the church and parsonage occupy level to moderate topography on an elevated slope that overlooks two small ponds and a tributary stream of Town Brook less than 1,000' southwest of the nominated property. A small man-made reservoir is located less than 1,000' northwest of the church. In general, however, the potential for locating significant ancient Native American cultural resources on the church property is low. Construction of the church, parsonage, and an outbuilding on the small lot (0.113 acres) would have destroyed any ancient resources that might have been located on the property.

A moderate to high potential exists for locating significant historic archaeological resources on the nominated property. Structural evidence may survive from stables, barns, and/or outbuildings

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
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that were located on the property after ca. 1840. At least one outbuilding was removed from the property by 1927. Archaeological evidence of occupational related features may also exist on the property. Construction features such as builder's trenches may exist around the foundation from original construction of the church in ca. 1840, rebuilding of the foundation in 1915-1916, and building of the stone wall in front of the church in ca. 1919. Evidence of trenches or buried utilities may exist in the vicinity of the church and parsonage beginning in the early 20th century.

(end)

Name of Property Bethel A.M.E. Church and Parsonage

County and State Plymouth, Massachusetts

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- A** owned by 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the 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):

- 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

RELIGION

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

ca. 1840 - 1957

Significant Dates

1870 – Church dedication

1895 – Parsonage construction

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA**

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Parsonage complex is historically significant for its long association with religious, civic, and social life, and for its enduring connection to the development of the African-American community of Plymouth, Massachusetts. Since its dedication as a church in 1870, it has provided sanctuary for all people to worship with dignity, self-respect, and humanity, and church members have contributed to Plymouth community. The simple frame structures, well preserved and carefully maintained, continue to serve the African-American community in the same capacity today. Architecturally, the buildings' simple functional plans, along with the transitional Greek Revival/Italianate-style of the church and the vernacular style of the parsonage exemplify the characteristics of mid- and late-19th-century vernacular design in Plymouth. For these reasons, the Plymouth Bethel AME Church and Parsonage complex meets Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places and is significant at the local level. The complex satisfies National Register Consideration A for its religious associations with the African-American community. The Plymouth Bethel AME Church and Parsonage retain integrity of location, design, setting, most materials, workmanship, feeling, association, and ethnic heritage. The period of significance extends from circa 1840, the construction date of the building, to 1957, or 50 years before the present.

African Methodist Episcopal Church

John and Charles Wesley first established Methodism as a reform movement within the Church of England in the 1730s. In the United States, the major denominations in the Wesleyan tradition all stem from the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was organized in Baltimore in 1784. Each is governed by an elected governing body called the General Conference that meets every four years and has an episcopal form of governance with bishops who oversee appointment of clergy and other matters. Governing rules called the Discipline are the basis for all but one of the churches (MUPJ 2006).

Three principal Methodist denominations arose in the history of Black Churches. Two formed in the 1790s immediately following the American Revolution. They emerged from the main branch

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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of the Methodist church, not as a result of doctrinal differences, but rather due to slavery, oppression, and dehumanization of people of African descent. The first was the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, formed by Richard Allen, a former slave, and a group of fellow worshippers of color, in 1794 in Philadelphia (AME Church 2005). The Philadelphia church is known as "Mother Bethel" meaning "house of the lord," and the term "Bethel" repeats in the name of churches throughout the denomination, as in Plymouth. In 1816 a convention of black Methodists decided to unite their churches under the name of the AME Church. They thus gained control over the governance of their churches and placed themselves beyond white ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Attendants elected Richard Allen bishop of the new denomination, a position he held until his death in 1831 (St. Paul AME Church 2005). Subsequently, the AME church spread to New York and northward to New England and Canada, and west to California. Missionary work also occurred in Haiti and Santo Domingo (Payne 1891). Today it has 2,300,000 members in the United States, as well as churches in the Caribbean, Africa, England, and Canada (MUPJ 2006).

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church began in New York City in 1796, also due to the poor treatment of blacks in white churches. While the AMEZ Church was building its own house of worship in 1820, Richard Allen sent representatives of the AME Church to start a church in New York. This action did not please the AMEZ church, and initiated tension between the two churches and a conflicted relationship about whether or not merge. The AMEZ Church fully separated from the white Methodist Episcopal Church in 1821 (Moore 1884). Today the AMEZ Church has 1,400,000 members in the United States and churches in the Caribbean, Africa, and England (MUPJ 2006).

The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (CME Church) was founded in 1870 in Jackson, Tennessee by former slaves who left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the aftermath of the Civil War. (Phillips 1925). This occurred as a phenomenon of the self-separation, or exodus of blacks from southern white churches between 1861 and 1871, during and following the Civil War (Dvorak 1991). The CME Church now has 850,000 members in the United States (MUPJ 2006).

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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The AME, AMEZ, and CME Churches were not greatly different from the original Methodist Church. Black church services, however, displayed cultural practices distinct to African-Americans; they were more spirited, with spiritual hymns and spontaneous praying and shouting that distinguished them from the more restrained white Methodist services (St. Paul AME Church 2005). These “revivalism” practices did, however, have affinity with the camp meetings that proliferated across the United States and helped make the Methodists that largest Protestant denomination in the country in the nineteenth century (Weiss 1987:3).

The AME and AMEZ Churches were active in many of the movements of the early 19th century, especially the abolition of slavery and racial equality efforts (Little 2000). In the South, the ranks were bolstered by evangelization among black soldiers during the Civil War between 1861 and 1865, and especially in the years immediately following the war (Dvorak 1991).

In the 19th century, with little opportunity to participate in white society or influence government at the state or even local levels, groups of African-Americans throughout New England banded together to form religious congregations. They looked to their local churches to provide both spiritual guidance and act as community centers for all manners of religious, political, and social meetings (Olausen *et al.* 1998). Perhaps the earliest was in New Bedford where the growth of the cohesive West End neighborhood fostered the development of African-American religious and social organizations. The first African-American church in New Bedford, the African Christian Church, was founded in 1826. By 1843, Bethel AME Church had been organized in the city.

The New England Conference of AME Churches was organized in New Bedford in 1852. In 1856 the New England district of the AME Church had 11 houses of worship, 8 pastors, and 661 members (Payne 1891). A Bethel AME Church, established in Boston in 1833 at an unknown location, was on Anderson Street by 1841; it moved from that second site to the Charles Street Meetinghouse (NR listed) in 1876, and became the **Charles Street AME Church. Bethel AME Church in Lynn** (NR listed) was organized in 1857 and is the oldest established African American church on the North Shore. The **Springfield Bethel AME Church** split from the St.

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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John's Congregational Church in 1865, a year earlier than the Plymouth church, and was formally established in 1869. **St. Paul's AME Church** in Cambridge was founded in 1870. Many of the church properties of the AME and AMEZ churches were acquired in a manner similar to Bethel AME Church in Plymouth, in that they were structures constructed for other functions that were acquired and converted to serve as a place of worship.

During the 20th century, the AME Church continued its active role, leading in the Civil Rights Movement and in responding to housing, welfare, and unionization needs of African-Americans relocated to northern cities. AME pastors filed suits against public school segregation, which culminated in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), and a decision by the Supreme Court of the United States that began the process of school desegregation. The AME Church remains a vibrant and engaged community across the United States with schools and universities, as well as being actively engaged in missionary work.

Today in Massachusetts, there are fifteen AME Churches with active and flourishing congregations. Among these, both the Charles Street AME Church, Boston, and the Bethel AME Church, New Bedford, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Neighboring AME Churches to Plymouth in the southeast region are located in Fall River and New Bedford, MA and in Newport and Providence, RI. Other AME churches are located in Cambridge, Lynn, Lowell, Roxbury, and Springfield, Massachusetts.

Bethel AME Church, Plymouth

Plymouth had a relatively small African-American population throughout the 18th century. In 1792, the town of Plymouth granted former pastureland to four African-American veterans of the Revolutionary War. These men – Cato Howe, Prince Goodwin, Plato Turner, and Quamany – were all formerly enslaved and were granted their freedom in 1778 after serving in the war. They developed a small agricultural community on the land known as Parting Ways (NR listed 1978). Members of these families continued to live in this area until the early 20th century (Deetz 1977:138–140). Plymouth's African-American population during the 19th century continued to be relatively small in relation to the number of white residents. In 1855, out of a

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
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population of 6,846 persons, there were 138 blacks in Plymouth. The town's African-American settlements were centered near Billington Sea and Little Pond about one mile west of the Plymouth Village center. At that time, there was no established African-American church, although black residents held revival camp meetings in Little Pond Grove. These meetings were most often led by pastors from Boston (Anonymous 1972).

By 1866, many members of the Plymouth black community organized to form an AME Church. Under the direction of Reverend William Johnson, the church purchased a small house located to the rear of the Plymouth Mills at 11 Billington Street from Mr. John B.S. Hadaway. The building was converted into a chapel and used from 1866 to 1870 as a place of worship for the AME Church (Sims 1938:7). In 1867, a disturbance, which may have been trespassing or burglary, was reported at the church, and the *Old Colony Memorial* reported in defense of the church, that the right of unmolested religious worship should at least be respected on Pilgrim soil (Anonymous 1972).

In July 1870, desiring a more substantial meetinghouse, the AME Church congregation sold the Billington Street building to Pilgrim Mills for \$112 and purchased the current, larger building at 6 Sever Street from Major Bates for \$1,000 (Plymouth County Registry of Deeds 1870a, 1870b). The exact date of construction of the building has not been determined, although visual and stylistic analysis dates the building at the middle of the nineteenth century. It does not appear on the 1830 map (Bourne 1830) and was standing by 1858 when Plymouth tax records list Andrew L. Russell as owning a gymnasium and lot (Plymouth Tax Records 1858). In addition to operating as a gymnasium under Charles F.W. Leonhardt, a Prussian by birth, from 1856 to 1857, according to church records the building had previously been used as a shoe shop, a riding academy, and a school (Plymouth Bethel AME Church 2003).

When the AME Church purchased the lot of land on the southwesterly side of Sever Street, the building was vacant, but was described as well suited to be adapted as a church, "being conveniently large, light and airy" (Anonymous 1972). The deeds list the trustees of the property as: Edward Giles, Charles B. Allen, Amos Goodwin, William H. Gray, Allen Mellencourt, Aaron C. Joseph, and George Lyle. All but one (Gray) of these seven men are

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
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listed in the 1870 US Federal Census. Many of these families were well-established in Plymouth by 1870, including the Lyle family, who owned property on Court Street, and W. Gray, whose son owned property at Gray and Davis Streets (Rev. Mesquitta 2006). The six Plymouth residents were between 30 and 50 years of age, and had been born in Maryland or North Carolina, except Aaron Joseph, who was born in Massachusetts. The first minister, Reverend Joshua Hale, had also been born in Maryland and was 53 in 1870. (www.ancestry.com 2006).

Reverend D.N. Mason, who was not a Plymouth resident, dedicated the building as an AME Church on August 5, 1870 (Sims 1938:8). The *Old Colony Memorial* of October 13, 1870 reported,

That branch of the church known as the AME which in some localities thrives as healthily as any other, on Pilgrim soil has experienced some difficulty in attaining a healthy and vigorous growth. The reasons are various and well known to our citizens, particularly to those who have assisted in establishing and maintaining the little society. After many struggles, they now find themselves in possession of a neat and attractive church edifice situated on an eminence near Russell Street, and on Sunday last, the same was dedicated to the worship of the living God.....The church is to be known as BETHEL, andis a neat and commodious building. The interior is plainly furnished; the preacher's desk is enclosed by a railing, the platform and aisles are carpeted, and the body of the room filled with short settees. (*Old Colony Memorial* 1870, quoted in Gomes 1966).

During the service, the new minister, the Rev. Joshua Hale, urged those present to liquidate the debt by bringing their gifts to the front of the church. Frequent benefit events were held to pay off the mortgage, which was accomplished in 1877, as reported in the June 14, 1877 *Old Colony Memorial*. During one of the years between 1871 and 1877, a special fundraiser was held to get money to heat the church during the subsequent winter. Mr. G. G. Dyer of the Old Colony Bank who was administering the AME Church account set up a special account to receive donations solicited from local residents sympathetic to the AME congregation.

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The AME Church has had at least 74 pastors throughout its history who served for one or two years, and without salary. The pastors were, and continue to be, part-time, and most lived elsewhere. From 1866 to 1884 in its two locations, the Plymouth church's pastors included William Johnson, James Elsemore, Ebenezer Ruby, Daniel Francis, Joshua Hale, D.N. Mason, E.P. Greenwich, Israel Derrick, Isaac Emery, Jeremiah B. Hill, and Henry Buckner (Hurd 1884:181). Many of the pastors, such as Reverend T.R. Geda, who served from 1883 to 1885, were also Elders of the Boston District. The parsonage was built in 1895 during the tenure of Reverend Antrim Lee, who served from 1894 to 1901, longer than all but one other pastor, Reverend Melford Mesquitta. Rev. Lee later filled in as pastor in 1903, 1905, 1907, and 1909-1910 during periods when the church lacked a leader. He does not appear to have lived in Plymouth. In the twentieth century, one pastor worked for Plymouth Cordage Company, and many were Boston University or Harvard University students (Rev. Mesquitta 2006). The church records contain the complete list of pastors up to the present.

The number of black residents in Plymouth remained constant during the late 19th century and gradually decreased in the early to mid-20th century. In 1870, the year the church was dedicated, Plymouth had 109 "Colored", or approximately 1.7%, out of a total of 6,239 residents. Approximately one-fifth had been born in southern states, and may have been former slaves. The population rose by 1900 to 140 "Black", comprising 1.5% of the total population of 9,641. In 1920, Plymouth's population of 13,045 included 84 "Black", a decline to 0.6%, with similar figures for 1930 (www.ancestry.com 2006).

Throughout the 20th century, the church membership fluctuated from being quite active to very low and dropped off towards the end of the 20th century. At times the church closed for a year or two because of small attendance. The recorded history of the church in the 20th century is limited primarily to four anniversary souvenir journals from the 1980s to 2003. The members were almost exclusively homeowners in Plymouth with the exception of travelers and domestic work workers. Among the seasonal and transient attendees were summer cottage owners from Cambridge, and guests of Mrs. Hayes, owner of the Kingston Inn and Twin Oaks in Duxbury, who catered to southern travelers (Rev. Mesquitta 2006).

Throughout its history the AME Church has served the Plymouth community in many ways,

(continued)

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**Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
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including by opening its doors during time of emergency. When the Mt. Pleasant School burned in 1904, the church served as a schoolhouse until the new school was completed in 1905 (Sims 1938:8). The church used Leyden Hall on Main Street as a place to host entertainment and refreshments (Sims 1938:9). The church has been an integral member of the Plymouth Council of Churches. Hospital and jail visits by clergy and church members were common. Mrs. Gray, in particular, was active in the Council of Churches and in the Church Women United organization. Concerts and musical exchanges were held at the AME Church for the Plymouth community (Rev. Mesquitta 2006).

Reverend Melford Mesquitta (born 1911 in Jamaica), a resident of Middleboro, MA, attended Edwards Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida in the 1940s, and served as pastor of Plymouth – Bethel AME Church on three different occasions, first from 1952 to 1960. He then served as pastor of Bethel – New Bedford from 1968 to 1978, also serving simultaneously in Plymouth for four years during that period. He often had difficulty finding paying work in Plymouth and was one of the few pastors to live in the Parsonage for a time. He recalls that sanitary facilities were outside the church and that the parsonage lacked bathing amenities for many years. His employment included working as a tailor in town, and for a hospital in Boston (Rev. Mesquitta 2006). Rev. Mesquitta returned to Plymouth in 1982 and served there until his retirement in 1992. At the age of 95, Rev. Mesquitta still attends and officiates at services. The Fellowship Hall in the basement of the AME Church was built and dedicated in his honor in 1991 (Plymouth Bethel AME Church 2003). The parsonage has been used by various ministers over the years, and was leased to a tenant at one point (Plymouth Bethel AME Church 2003). It currently serves as the church office, and pastors occasionally stay overnight.

Plymouth is unusual as most of the regional Bethel AME churches are in large metropolitan cities. Although Bethel AME Church, Plymouth is located in a small town, it continues to be an integral part of the local and larger AME community. Bethel AME Church of Plymouth is part of the New England Conference, Boston-Hartford District with offices in Springfield, MA. Like the other small Bethel AME churches in the southern New England (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) region, the Plymouth Church has never has a large congregation. However, as the nearest Bethel AME churches to Plymouth are in Boston, Southeastern Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, Plymouth has served the local and regional African American

(continued)

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population. The Bethel AME Church today continues to own and worship in the Sever Street location with a congregation of 60 with approximately 30 to 40 who attend service every Sunday. The Bethel AME Church welcomed its first female minister, Reverend Althea Jackson, in 1994. The Reverend Barbara J. Simmons currently presides over the congregation. The congregation is committed to renovation and upkeep of the buildings.

Archaeological Significance

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to document the early history of the church structure and the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of Plymouth's African American community from the mid-19th through 20th centuries. Additional documentary research combined with archaeological survey and testing may help locate evidence of all structures and occupational related features originally located on the nominated property, their sequence of construction and associations. Mapping and detailed analysis of the contents and associations of these structures and features may help identify the original construction date for the church structure and the activities that occurred around the church and parsonage. Detailed analysis of the contents of occupational related features may also contribute valuable information relating to 19th and 20th century life in Plymouth's African American community and earlier church functions as a gym, shoe shop, riding academy, and school. Any information related to the African American community would be very important by contributing information on the role that the AME Church played in the history of the African American community in Plymouth.

(end)

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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
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(continued)

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Continuation Sheet

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

Section number 9 Page 2

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(continued)

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Continuation Sheet

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

Section number 9 Page 3

Plymouth Bethel AME Church

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2006 Rev. Melford Mesquitta, Bethel AME Church pastor, retired. Personal communication with Mark Rayburn, PAL, July 9, 2006.

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
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Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

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2006 Rev. Barbara J. Simmons, Bethel AME Church pastor. Personal communication with Mark Rayburn, PAL, July 9, 2006.

Maps

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Sanborn Map Company

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Other Helpful Web Sites

AME Homepage <http://www.ame-church.com>

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New Bedford Historical Society (information on area churches)

<http://www.newbedfordhistory.org/>

(end)

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property less than once acre**UTM References See continuation sheet.**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1. 19	361680	4646120	3.			
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
2.			4.			
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
			__ 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 Byname/title Diana C. Parcon, and Virginia H. Adams, PAL, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Directororganization Massachusetts Historical Commission date February 2007street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470city or town Boston state MASS zip code 02125**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 Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Churchstreet & number 6 Sever Street telephone 508-746-4239city or town Plymouth state MA zip code 02360**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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

Section number 10 Page 1

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the nominated property Plat 17, Lot 75 conforms to the accompanying Assessors Map.

Boundary Justification:

Plat 17, Lot 75 has been historically associated with this building since the mid-nineteenth century and with Bethel AME Church's ownership of the property since 1870.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage
Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

Section number _____ Page _____

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Diana C. Parcon
Date: August 2005

These photographs were taken with a Nikon E5400 digital camera at high resolution and printed on Epson premium Glossy paper using Epson UltraChrome pigmented inks per the NPS March 2005 Photo Policy Expansion list of acceptable ink and paper combinations for digital images.

Resolution of original image capture: 300 dpi JPEG
Printer make and model: Epson R800

1. Church façade (east) and south elevations, looking northwest.
2. Church façade (east) and north elevations, looking southwest
3. Church sanctuary interior, looking west
4. Parsonage façade (east) and north elevations, looking southwest

File name:

MA-Plymouth County-Bethel AME Church - 01
MA-Plymouth County-Bethel AME Church - 02
MA-Plymouth County-Bethel AME Church - 03
MA-Plymouth County-Bethel AME Church - 04

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Parsonage

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Plymouth

DATE RECEIVED: 2/08/07 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 2/26/07
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/13/07 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 3/24/07
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 07000168

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

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

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 3/19/2007 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Historically & architecturally significant 19th century and Parsonage.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A&C

REVIEWER Patrick Andrus

DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE _____

DATE 3/19/2007

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

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



PLYMOUTH, BETHEL AME CHURCH & PARSONAGE

PHOTOGRAPHER: DIANA C. PARSON, PAL

DATE: AUGUST 2005

photo #1 Church facade (east) and south elevations, looking NW



PLYMOUTH, BETHEL AME CHURCH + PARSONAGE

PHOTOGRAPHER : DIANA C. PARSON, PAL

DATE : AUGUST 2005

photo 2 : church facade (east) and with elevations, looking SW



PLYMOUTH, BETHEL AVE CHURCH & PARSONAGE

PHOTOGRAPHER: DIANA C. PACEW, PAL

DATE: AUGUST 2005

photo #3 Church sanctuary interior, looking W



PLYMOUTH, BETHEL AME CHURCH & PARSONAGE

PHOTOGRAPHER: DIANA C. PARSON, PAL

DATE: AUGUST 2005

photo # 4 Parsonage facade (east) and with elevations, looking SW



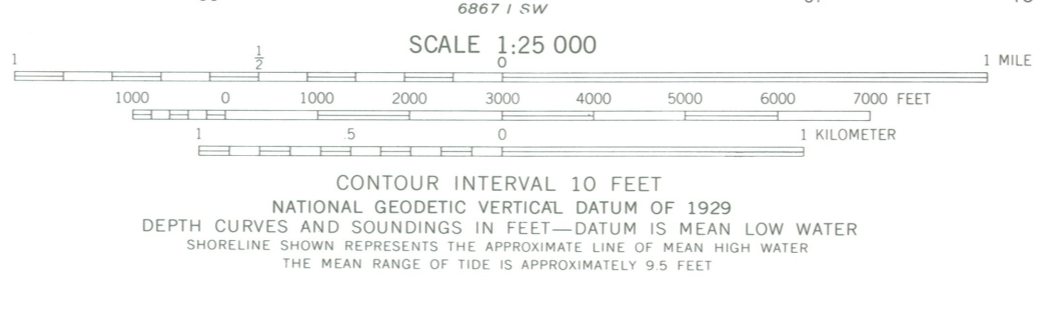
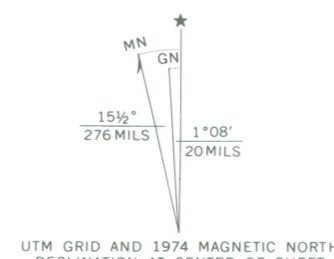
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14000 4267
13000 4033
12000 3800
11000 3567
10000 3333
9000 3100
8000 2867
7000 2633
6000 2400
5000 2167
4000 1933
3000 1700
2000 1467
1000 1233
0 1000
0 0

6000
BETH EL AFRICAN METHODIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PARSONAGE
PLYMOUTH COUNTY, MA
UTM REFERENCE:
19.0361683, 4646120

Feet Meters
1 3048
2 6096
3 9144
4 12192
5 15240
6 18288
7 21336
8 24384
9 27432
10 30480

To convert feet to meters
multiply by 3.048
To convert meters to feet
multiply by 3.2808

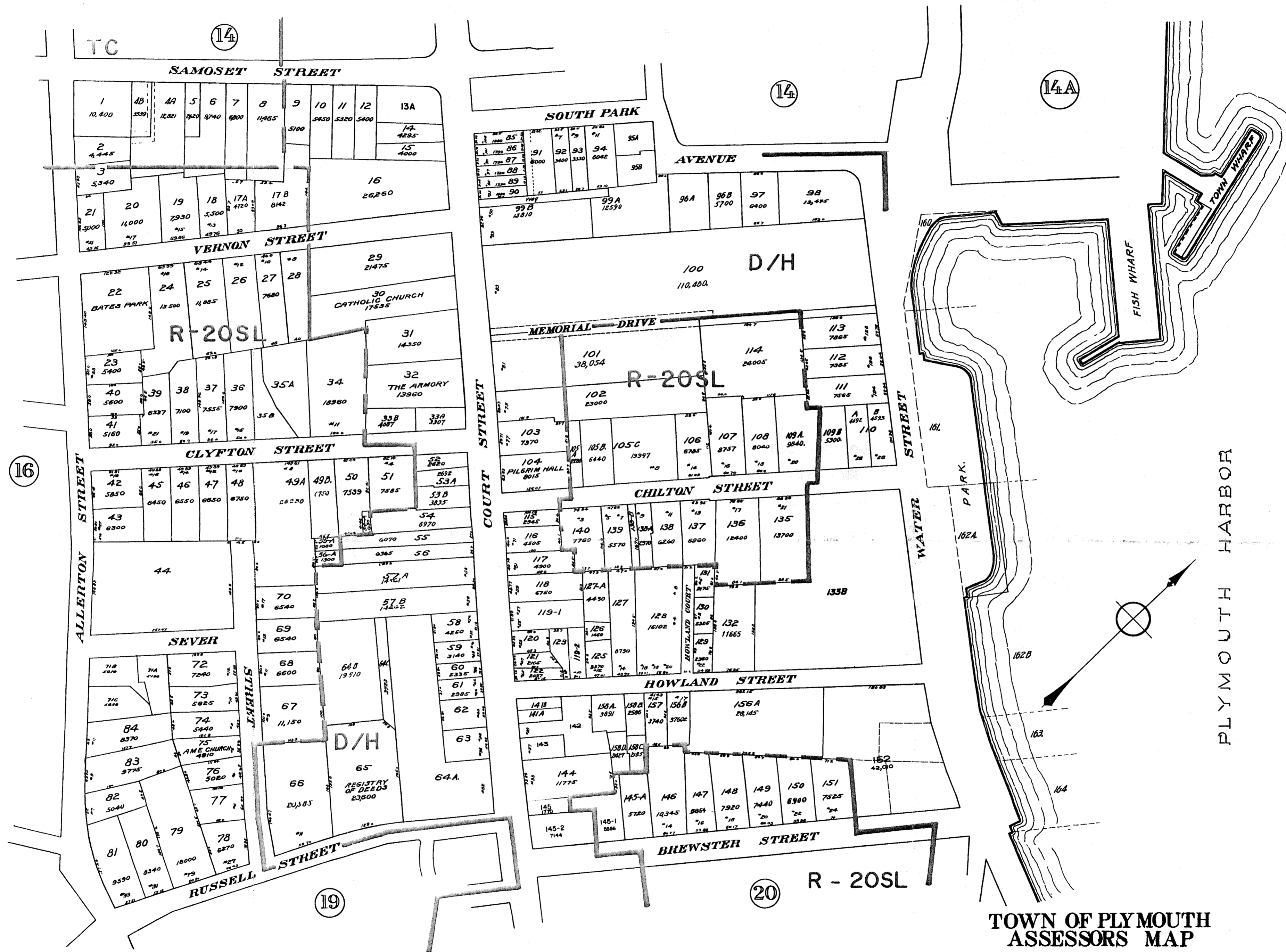
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Topography by planetable surveys 1934. Revised from aerial
photographs taken 1974. Field checked 1974
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS 245 (1972)
This information is not intended for navigational purposes
Polyconic projection. North American datum
10,000-foot grid ticks, based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid,
zone 19
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown
Map photoinspected 1977
No major culture or drainage changes observed



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

PLYMOUTH, MASS.
N4152.5—W7037.5/7.5
1974
PHOTOINSPECTED 1977
AMS 6867 1 NW—SERIES V814

FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

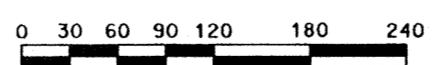


**TOWN OF PLYMOUTH
ASSESSORS MAP**

SCALE: 1" = 120' JAN. 1, 2005

MAINTAINED BY THE PLYMOUTH ENGINEERING DIVISION

NOTE: THIS PLAN TO BE USED FOR ASSESSING PURPOSES ONLY
MAPS ORIGINALLY CREATED BY DELAND & KEITH, SURVEYORS



OFFICE OF THE
CLERK OF THE
SUPERIOR COURT
JULY 2006



RECEIVED
SEP 12 2006
MASS. HIST. COMM



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission



February 6, 2007

Mr. J. Paul Loether
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, NW 8th floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

Enclosed please find the following nomination form:

Bethel AME Church and Parsonage, Plymouth (Plymouth), MA

The nomination has been voted eligible by the State Review Board and has been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. The owners of the property in the Certified Local Government community of Plymouth were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 60 to 90 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Betsy Friedberg

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

enclosure

cc: James Roth, Plymouth Historical Commission
Rev. Barbara J. Simmons, Bethel AME Church
Richard Quintal, Board of Selectmen
Lee Hartman, Plymouth CLG Coordinator
Virginia Adams, PAL, Consultant