

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
(203) 566-3005

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM

For Buildings and Structures

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
TOWN NO.:		SITE NO.:	
UTM: 18/	/	/	/
QUAD:			
DISTRICT:	S	NR:	ACTUAL POTENTIAL

IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME: Common: A.M.E. Zion Church Historic: same
- 2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTY: Middlesex
- 3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 140 Cross Street
- 4. OWNER(S): African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Inc. PUBLIC  PRIVATE
- 5. USE: Present: Religious Historic: same
- 6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road:  yes  no  
Interior accessible:  yes, explain at services  no

DESCRIPTION

Plain Late 19th Century

- 7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Meetinghouse DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1867
- 8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):  
 clapboard  asbestos siding  brick  
 wood shingle  asphalt siding  fieldstone  
 board & batten  stucco  cobblestone  
 aluminum siding  concrete: type: combination  cut stone: type: \_\_\_\_\_  
 other: block and poured foundation

STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:

- wood frame:  post and beam  balloon
- load bearing masonry  structural iron or steel
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

ROOF: type:

- gable  flat  mansard  monitor  sawtooth
- gambrel  shed  hip  round  other \_\_\_\_\_
- material:  
 wood shingle  roll asphalt  tin  slate  
 asphalt shingle  built up  tile  other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 1 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 50'x31'

12. CONDITION: Structural:  excellent  good  fair  deteriorated  
Exterior:  excellent  good  fair  deteriorated

13. INTEGRITY: Location:  on original site  moved, when: 1921  
Alterations:  no  yes, explain: Front entranceway added; building extended at rear

RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

- barn  shed  garage  other landscape features or buildings: grassed parking lot, rear; parsonage close to church on small lot
- carriage house  shop  garden

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:

- open land  woodland  residential  scattered buildings visible from site
- commercial  industrial  rural  high building density

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: This historic Black church is sited on a small plot on the north side of Cross Street. The area just southwest of the Wesleyan University campus is a closely-built residential district characterized by modest 2½-story houses. Screened in by yew and boxwood hedges, the church is placed on low ground that slopes down from the nearby sidewalk.

17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

Handcarved wooden altar rail, pulpit decoration, and chancel window framing using Gothic motifs

SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: \_\_\_\_\_ Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

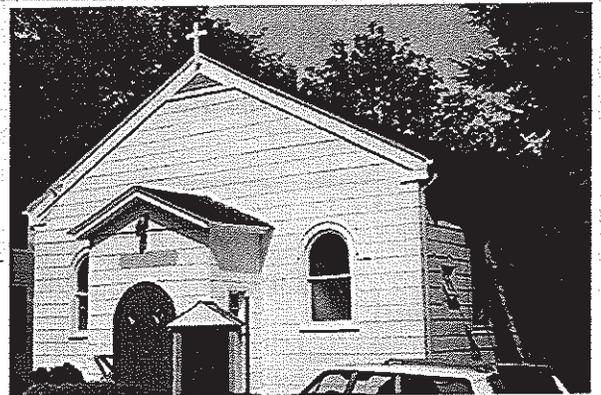
18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States calls itself the "Freedom Church." An offshoot of the Methodist Church, which was integrated from its inception, the A.M.E. Zion Church was established as a separate black denomination in 1796 in New York City. In Connecticut a Zion Church was set up in New Haven in 1820, and was followed soon by Middletown in 1823. Land on the south side of Cross Street (now called upper Church Street) was bought from Henry Paddock in 1829; by 1830 a 39'x31' meeting house had been erected and dedicated. During the period up to the Civil War members and friends of this Middletown Freedom Church were active agents of the Underground Railroad. An 1867 mortgage and existing cornerstone of the same date indicate that the building was rebuilt in that year. Although a strong oral tradition exists that the current building is the original one, no physical evidence of the 1830 building has been found. The 1867 building stayed on the first Cross Street site across from the Wesleyan campus until 1921, when it was moved one quarter of a mile west and placed on the north side of the street at its present location.

The A.M.E. Zion Church is a plain structure consisting of a one-story audience room under

(see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Roger Sherman  
date: 7/78 view: south  
negative on file: Roll 34, #34



COMPILED BY:

name: Roger Sherman date: 8/78  
organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust  
address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

19. SOURCES: Middletown Land Records; History of Middlesex County (Chicago: J.B. Beers, 1884); Beers Atlas, 1874; David Henry Bradley, Sr. A History of the A.M.E. Zion Church (Nashville: Parthemon Press, 1956); Horatio T. Strothers, The Underground Railroad in Connecticut

(see continuation sheet)

20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

none known  highways  vandalism  developers  other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 renewal  private  deterioration  zoning  explanation: The building is

inadequate to seat the congregation at services. A consulting architect has advised the congregation to build a new sanctuary elsewhere, rather than to try to preserve and expand this building (primarily because the local building code requires more parking space than is available on this small plot).

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Form number: 18&19 Date: 8/78

A.M.E. Zion Church  
140 Cross St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

#18

a low gable roof. Exposed and encased interior, sidewall, posts support contemporary roof trusses under a plywood and asphalt shingle roof. A basement room which is partially below ground on the sloping lot is used as a parish hall and social room. The rear of the building has been extended some ten feet to form an area for a podium, choir stalls, altar, and twin pulpits. Gothic-motif carving appears on the altar rail, pulpit, chancel window frame, and the arms of the pews. On the facade a pair of round-arched windows flank a shallow enclosed entranceway, which has a similar round-arched doorway.

This modest, plainly-styled chapel has important historical antecedents-- as Connecticut's second-oldest A.M.E. Zion church, and Middletown's branch of the "Freedom Church."

#19

(Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962); Consultation with Rev. Douglas Lawrence and church history committee, 9/78.