STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
(203) 566-3005  
HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM  
For Buildings and Structures

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 X PRIVATE  
5. USE: Present: Religious Historic: same  
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: X yes no  
Interior accessible: X yes, explain at services no

DESCRIPTION  
7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Plain Late 19th Century Meetinghouse DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1867  
8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):  
   - clapboard  
   - wood shingle  
   - board & batten  
   - aluminum siding  
   - other:  
   X asbestos siding  
   - asphalt siding  
   - stucco  
   - concrete: type: combination block and poured foundation  
   - brick  
   - fieldstone  
   - cobblestone  
   - other:  
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:  
   X wood frame; X post and beam; balloon  
   - load bearing masonry  
   - structural iron or steel  
   - other:  
10. ROOF type:  
   X gable  
   - gambrel  
   - shed  
   - hip  
   - round  
   - other:  
   - material:  
   - wood shingle  
   - roll asphalt  
   - tin  
   - slate  
   - built up  
   - tile  
   - other:  
11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 1 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 50'x31'  
12. CONDITION: Structural: X excellent  
   Excellent: X good  
   - good  
   - fair  
   - fair  
   - fair  
   - deteriorated  
   Exterior: X excellent  
   X good  
   - good  
   - fair  
   - fair  
   - deteriorated  
13. INTEGRITY: Location: X on original site moved, when: 1921  
   Alterations: X yes, explain: Front entranceway added; building extended at rear
14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:  
   - barn  
   - shed  
   - garage  
   - carriage house  
   - shop  
   - garden  
   - other landscape features or buildings: grassed parking lot, rear; parsonage close to church on small lot  
15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:  
   - open land  
   - woodland  
   - residential  
   - scattered buildings visible from site  
   - commercial  
   - industrial  
   - rural  
   X 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

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


20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS: (see continuation sheet)

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

_X_ none known _x_ highways _x_ vandalism _x_ developers _x_ other: 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).
a low gable roof. Exposed and encased interior, sideward, 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."

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