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FINAL
EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

018-179-10068

historic Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church

and/or common Bethel Church

2. Location

street & number 4500 East County Road 300 South N/A not for publication

city, town Bluffton X vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state Indiana code 018 county Wells code 179

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Trustees of Bethel Evangelical Methodist Church c/o Mrs. Ruth Potts, Trustee

street & number 4770 South County Home Road

city, town Bluffton N/A vicinity of state Indiana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wells County Recorder's Office

street & number Wells County Courthouse

city, town Bluffton state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title no surveys/Part I Tax Certification has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date July 29, 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records NPS control number 0180-83-IN

city, town Philadelphia state Pennsylvania

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bethel Church stands on a wooded knoll above the banks of Six-Mile Creek. A broad lawn covers the slope from the creek banks up to the church, which is aligned with its length parallel to the South side of county road 300 South. The church cemetery extends behind the building to the South and East and is separated from the road by an iron fence which originally met the rear (Northeast) corner of the church (Photo 1). To the South the cemetery includes the site of the second church (1863), which was replaced by the present structure in 1900 (Photo 2).

The church is an irregular one story rectangular hip-roofed mass punctuated by a square three story bell tower, which contains the main entrance and is set diagonally on the Northwest corner at the intersection of the two principal elevations. The tower is flanked on the West and North by the gables of the sanctuary. The remainder of the North facade is punctuated by the smaller gable of a secondary entrance. A single gable is centered on the East elevation, and the South side of the building has no interruptions of the eave of the main roof, although the Eastern third of that side of the building projects slightly to the North (Photo 3).

All of the openings for the entrances and windows are round-arched, and the grouping of the fenestration reflects both the exterior composition and the internal organization of the building. Each of the sanctuary gables has three closely-grouped windows, of which the central opening is taller than the flanking openings. An isolated narrow window is placed to the side of each of the sanctuary gables opposite the bell tower. On the eastern third of the North facade, two windows are set closely together to the left of the side entrance. On the East elevation a pair of windows is set under the central gable and a single window is used in each of the flanking bays. On the projecting third of the South elevation, two windows correspond with the vestry. A single louvered opening is placed in the top of each of the gables.

The irregular form and complex fenestration pattern of the design is in contrast to the rigorous manner in which the walls are treated to visually imitate the type of heavy stone masonry construction more generally associated with the Richardsonian Romanesque style. One characteristic of that type of construction is the contrast through differences of surface finish or material color between the plane of the wall and the elements which ornament the wall or define openings. The brick masonry of the Bethel Church accomplishes this effect through the use of two types of colored mortar and a red stain. All of the planar surfaces of the walls are of soft-pressed common brick laid in white mortar. The same brick laid in red mortar and painted with red stain is used to create the stylistic elements of the walls.

Immediately above the rock-faced ashlar limestone of the foundation wall and projecting water table, three groups of four courses each are separated by single courses of white-laid brick to give the appearance of base courses laid with rusticated joints. The same effect is used at the corners of the building, beneath the fractables of the gables, and on the surrounds of openings to simulate the effect of masonry quoins as well as the voussoirs of arches. Corbelling at the tops of the corner quoins gives them the appearance of rusticated pilasters, and the same treatment was also used for the three tall stacks which originally broke the roofline (and have since been replaced by the single chimney of a modern furnace), as well as the piers of the belfry, which support an arcade of three Syrian arches on each side of the bell tower. (Photo 4).

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The corbelling of the bases of the gable fractables allows their smooth faces to project flush with the fascia of the corbelled frieze and cornice which top the walls. This corbelling simulates the effect of a wide frieze whose eave is supported by regularly spaced modillion blocks; on the flat fascia, the plain square boxes of the original hung metal gutters are still in place on the North half of the roof (elsewhere modern ogee gutters have been hung). The corbelled frieze is continued without modillions on the rakes of the gables, and the tops of the gable walls and the fractables are trimmed with painted wooden crown molding.

The roof of the building still has its original wood shingles exposed on its North half, and there the original galvanized iron ridge covers and gable finials are also still extant. The South half of the roof has been covered in asphalt shingles, and the trim has been removed from the eaves and the main ridge of the roof. Although presently clad in asphalt shingles, the roof of the bell tower has retained its metal trim, but the sawn wooden balustrade which originally decorated the belfry openings is gone.

The entrance doors of the church are pairs of 3 panel leaves with round-topped upper panels. Both the semi-circular transoms over the entrances and the one-over-one sash of the double-hung windows are made of wood.

All of the windows are glazed in leaded stained glass. The panels of the sanctuary use opalescent glass and colored glass beads in trefoil and fleur-de-lis motifs. The transom panel over the main entrance has the historic name of the church worked in white translucent glass and enframed by scrollwork; the panel over the side entrance has roughly the same design without the lettering. The panels in the Sunday school room and vestry on the East end of the building use translucent colored glass and molded colored glass rosettes in a grid-like pattern, punctuated by a cartouche of opalescent glass in the top of the upper panel and a design of circles inscribed in an oval in the bottom of the lower panel.

The interior of the church consists of two major spaces, the sanctuary and the Sunday school room, and three minor areas, the entrance vestibules and the vestry. The sanctuary is nearly square and occupies the Western two-thirds of the plan. The Sunday school room is a rectangular space aligned with its length parallel to the East side of the sanctuary, and the two rooms are interconnected by a wide roll-up partition. The vestibules are located in the base of the bell tower and within the side door, in a space partitioned from the Northwest corner of the Sunday school room. The vestry is located behind (South) the Sunday school room, in the projecting section of the South elevation.

The sanctuary's main aisle is set upon the room's diagonal and has the vestibule at one end (Northwest) and the bow-front platform of the pulpit at the opposite end. The floor of the sanctuary slopes down from the North and West sides of the room to the face of the pulpit, and the seating consists of original golden oak curved pews (Photos 5, 6). The rail of the pulpit platform has square dies topped by urn-shaped finials at either end and a plywood facing between, which conceals a blind gallery of turned balusters.

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Behind the pulpit a large opening with rounded top corners fills almost the entire diagonal wall across the (Southeast) corner of the sanctuary and opens into the six-sided recess of the chancel. This polygonal recess is ingeniously formed by the intersection of the chamfered Southwest corner of the Sunday school room, the West end of the vestry, and two triangular closets in the corner formed by the projection noted above on the Eastern third of the South elevation. A plastered opening with rounded corners originally connected the vestry and chancel, and another may have connected the chancel and the Sunday school room, whose floor slopes toward the Southwest (any opening is presently concealed by the modern panelling on both sides of the wall).

As noted above, the Sunday school room is connected to the sanctuary by an operable partition (Photo 7). The room is entered through a vestibule within the side entrance which also connects to the sanctuary. On the South end of the Sunday school room two separate doors lead into the vestry and into a basement stairwell which was created by partitioning the East end of the vestry.

The vestry and basement stairwell each have false ceilings; that of the stairwell is lower in order that access via a hatch in the partition can be made from the vestry to the original attic hatch in the ceiling above. Investigation of this area of the building led to the recent discovery that the painting and stencilling of the vestry walls is still visible in the stairwell (Photo 8) and in the storage area above its ceiling (Photo 9).

Further investigation of the walls in the sanctuary and Sunday school room reveals that the "frescoes" mentioned in accounts of the dedication of the church in 1900 refer to the actual use of fresco technique to paint the walls, which were then stencilled as well. The original color scheme used a deep green up to the window sills, and a lighter apple green above. Just below the ceiling a thin red line separated the green from a light buff which extended from the top six inches of the wall to fill the margins between panels of apple green on the ceiling. Although the full design of the original painting has not been uncovered, a bold frieze of serpentine crimson two feet high has been uncovered along the top of the sanctuary walls (Photo 10).

The color scheme seen above the vestry appears to be a second painting and stencilling of the interior. Ochre was used up to the sill line, light grey on the walls, and off-white on the ceilings. A sepia colored stencilled band highlighted with red and green ran along the top of the ochre (Photo 11), and a pattern of parallel dashed sepia lines interrupted at intervals by a shield design highlighted in red and green was used along the frieze of the vestry, Sunday school, and sanctuary (Photo 12). This second painting was then over-painted with a succession of solid colors, including the present white.

The attic yielded the evaporated gasoline light fixtures which were also mentioned in the accounts of the dedication. These six fixtures were interconnected by chromed one-inch tubing from an evaporator in the tower. Each fixture has a wide glass shade above two jets which presumably were fitted with mantels (Photo 13). The present electrical fixtures may date from the electrification of the building in 1931.

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Overall the church has seen few permanent alterations to its original fabric. Although accounts of the dedication describe a furnace, it seems that the building was actually heated by three stoves until a modern furnace was installed in the basement. The electrification of the building would have been roughly contemporary with the creation of an inside access to the basement, which was used as a Sunday school area, even though its walls and ceiling are unfinished. The redecoration of the walls and overpainting of the clear varnish on the interior doors and the marblized wood casings of the windows have been perhaps the most profound alteration to the interior, since such alterations obscured the interior effects which were the equivalent of the elaborate brickwork on the exterior.

Today the numbers of the congregation have been greatly reduced by the cumulative effects of decreases in the number of rural families in the area and the mobility of their children, who have in most cases joined the general trend of moving to urban areas elsewhere. This has been reflected in the increasing difficulty faced by the remaining members in the task of maintaining the building and grounds as a tangible part of the area's heritage, and as an active place of worship.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1900

Builder/Architect Cuno Kibebe, architect

Statement of Significance (~~In one paragraph~~)

The Bethel Church is primarily of local architectural significance as one of three known church designs by local architect Cuno Kibebe (1866-1927) and as an example of the treatment in brick construction of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

Bethel and a very similar Methodist church structure in nearby Ossian were both designed by Kibebe in 1899, and both are still extant. The two projects are listed in a drawing index included among his papers at the Architecture Archive of Ball State University. A third church at Liberty Center in Wells County was noted in a local news account in 1896, but is no longer extant. That Kibebe began his career as a brick mason is aptly illustrated by his ingenious use of bricks and mortar to simulate heavy masonry detail on both the Bethel and Ossian designs. The technique of using colored mortar and stain to do so was generally in use in the area at the time. Bethel is unique among local examples, however, in that this part of its original appearance is still intact; many of the extant examples, including the Ossian Methodist Church, have been sandblasted and repointed in one color of mortar, thus destroying the original architectural expression. Bethel is also of value as an illustration of the type of interior decoration originally intended for buildings of its age and style; without exception, nineteenth century churches which have had active congregations have at least painted out the original decorations, if not having altered the walls themselves.

Bethel Church is also of social and historical significance as the focal point of a rural community. A number of families who had emigrated to Wells County from Pennsylvania and Ireland formed the Bethel Methodist Episcopal congregation sometime in the 1840's; the membership still includes direct descendents of the original membership. During the late Nineteenth century Bethel was one of three Methodist Episcopal churches which shared a circuit minister in Wells County; the church may only have had a permanent pastor during the mid-Twentieth century. At the time the church was dedicated in 1900 it had twenty-six members; the size of the congregation stayed constant until after World War II, when it began to decline. As such, Bethel's associations with the lives of its member families, and the decline of its membership as a result of urban migration, is typical of the social character and history of rural churches in this area.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Kibele drawing index, Architecture Archive, College of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Planning, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.

_____, "Bethel's New Temple," Banner, Bluffton, Indiana, November 7, 1900.

_____, "Pretty Country Church," Bluffton Weekly Chronicle, Bluffton, Indiana, November 5, 1900.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Bluffton

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

A part of the Northwest corner of the Northeast quarter of Section 23, Township 26, Range 12 East, consisting of the Bethel Church and the area immediately surrounding the structure a distance of ten feet in all directions from the perimeter of the building excluding the cemetery.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Craig Leonard, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization

date August 1983

street & number 521 West Market Street

telephone (219)-824-4010

city or town Bluffton

state Indiana

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer

date 1-24-84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

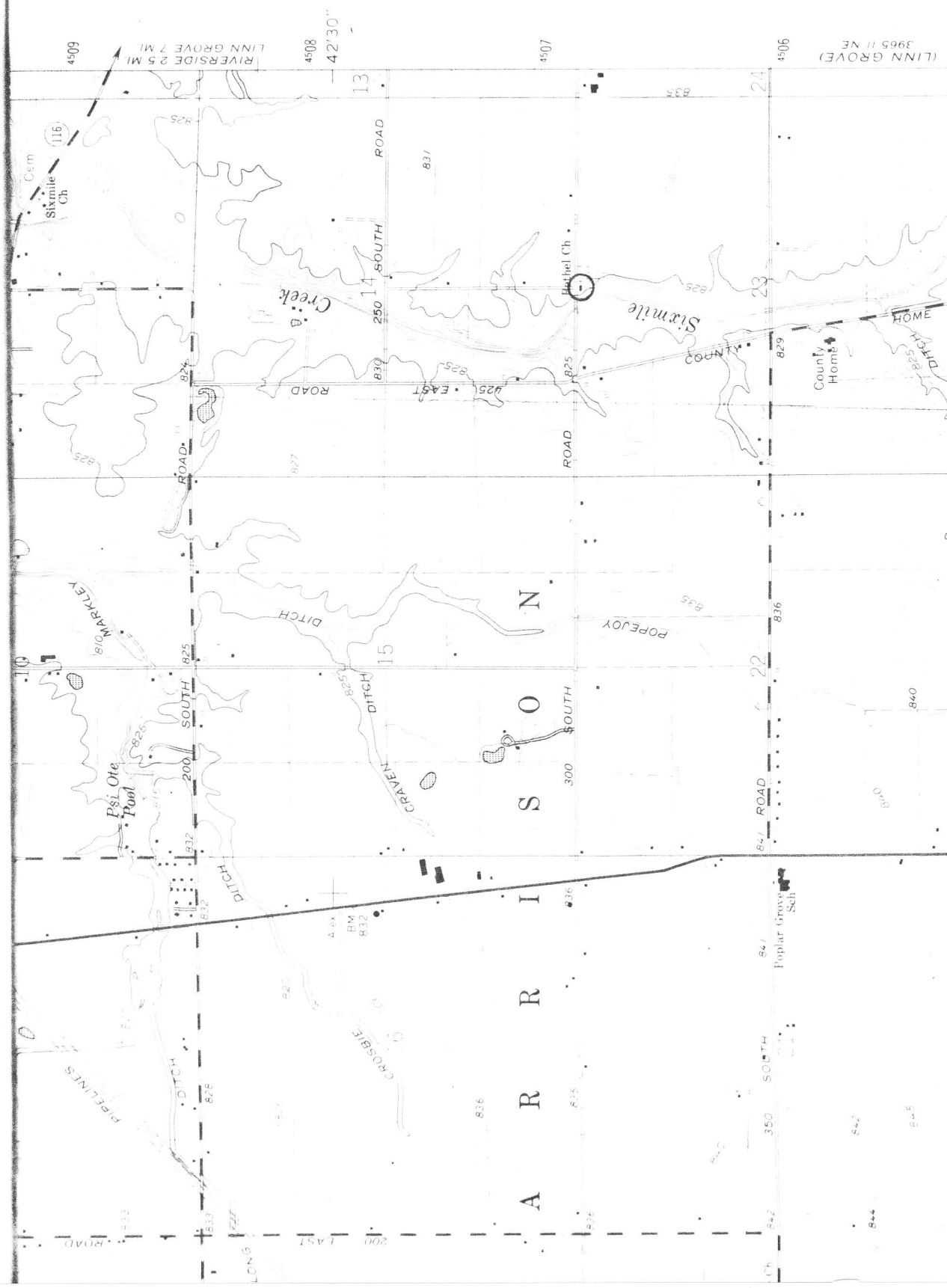
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

Rethel Methodist Episcopal Church
vic. of Bluffton, Indiana
UTM Reference: 16/657490/4506780



(LINN GROVE)
3965 11 NE

4506

4507

4508

4509

RIVERSIDE 2.5 MI
LINN GROVE 7 MI

HOME

County Home

N
S
O

A
R
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Poplar Grays Sch

PIPELINES

ROAD

200 EAST

ROAD 350 SOUTH

842

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842

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836

POPEJOY

835

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300 SOUTH

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