

**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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Mount Zion A.M.E. ChurchOther names/site number: N/AName of related multiple property listing: N/A**2. Location**Street & number: 380 North Fairfield RoadCity or town: Tredyffrin Township State: Pennsylvania County: ChesterNot For Publication: NA Vicinity: NA**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 at the following level(s) of significance: ☐ national ☒ statewide ☐ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

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<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<u>Pennsylvania Historical &amp; Museum Commission</u>	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	
In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<hr/>	
<b>Signature of commenting official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<hr/>	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register☐ determined eligible for the National Register☐ determined not eligible for the National Register☐ removed from the National Register☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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## 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	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

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

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

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## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Asphalt shingles, stucco

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church is a 1-story stone house of worship located in Devon, Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania, approximately 15 miles west of Philadelphia and within an area of the city's western suburbs known as the "Main Line."<sup>1</sup> The church building is located in a wooded suburban community consisting of dense residential buildings dating to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building was completed c.1880 and rebuilt and enlarged in 1906. It is a 1-story stucco over stone building with a front end gabled orientation. Constructed with a vernacular appearance (in keeping with A.M.E. traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the building was given a more ecclesiastical feeling with the installation of stained glass memorial windows c.1922; the building retains architectural integrity. On the south end of the property is a contributing cemetery and a noncontributing church constructed in 1991. The cemetery doesn't relate directly to the "School Fight" area of significance that is the focus of this nomination, but it is historically associated with the church and adds to several aspects of integrity, including setting, feeling, and association. The resources are located on a 1.38-acre property. The modern church is visually separated from the historic church by the cemetery, and does not directly impact the setting of the historic church. The church and its immediate setting, the adjacent cemetery, retain integrity.

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#### Narrative Description

The property, located in the southern part of Tredyffrin Township, is bounded on the west by Berwyn Baptist Road and on the north and east by North Fairfield Road. The 1.38-acre property, accessed from the east via North Fairfield Road, is mainly flat with mature trees or hedges lining

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<sup>1</sup> The "Main Line" is a series of suburbs that emerged along the "main line" of the Pennsylvania Railroad west of Philadelphia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These communities became well-to-do as commuting to work by train became a viable economic choice for middle and upper class Philadelphians.

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its boundary. The historic Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building is located in the extreme northern portion of the property, very near the intersection of the roads, and the bend in North Fairfield Road is located very close to the building's northeast corner. The cemetery is located in the center of the property, immediately south of the historic church building, and a 1991 church building (non-contributing) is located in the southern portion of the property west of a parking lot. A small frame marquee near the entrance to the historic church building is considered a minor landscape feature and is not included in the resource count.

Note: numbers in brackets indicate photos; for example, [1] indicates Photo 1.

### **c.1880/1906 Mount Zion A.M.E. Church Building [1-14]**

The historic church building, no longer in use for regular religious services, occupies the north end of the tract and is immediately adjacent to and framed on three sides by Berwyn Baptist Road to the west and the 90-degree turning North Fairfield Road to the north and east. The 1-story frame and stone building is oriented to the east. Incorporating the Chapel Plan design, it has a rectangular main block measuring 25'x54' with two small additions: an entrance vestibule on the east end and a restroom addition on the south elevation. The building is a typical example of the "raised" subset of the Chapel Plan, meaning that it was built over a full basement (this is one of the most common modes of religious architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). In keeping with A.M.E. aesthetics at the time of construction, the building does not incorporate high-style Gothic architectural elements, instead relying on an understated division between the chancel and seating areas in the sanctuary. With the entrance on the east end, the interior of the building is oriented towards the alter area on the west end, with wooden pews in between.

The building has a front end gabled roof clad with asphalt shingles and a molded cornice. A small stuccoed furnace chimney is roughly centered along the south side wall. The side walls (north and south elevations) are stucco over stone. The west end wall is stucco over frame, and both end walls are frame above the eave line; the gable area is clad with wood shingles. The east gable has a datestone which reads "MOUNT ZION A.M.E. CHURCH – ERECTED 1861 – REMODELED 1901 – REBUILT 1906" [7]. The building's foundation is stucco over rubble stone. The side walls have paired 3-light casement windows providing natural light to the basement; one such window is located below each stained glass window on the main floor level.<sup>2</sup>

One of the building's more visible elements is the series of 14 stained glass memorial windows: five on each side wall and two on each end wall. On the side walls, the spacing between the windows increases to the west. The pointed arch windows feature multiple inset lights; most have a circle near the top with one of various symbols representing Christ, the Holy Ghost, or the Bible. Most windows also have a panel near the bottom with the name of the person or family who paid for that particular window. (The windows date to a fund-raising program c.1922 to satisfy church debt. Families could "purchase" a window through subscriptions; names of the subscribers are memorialized on most of the windows [13].) The stained glass units are typical 1920s-era memorial window types for small, modest church buildings.

The building's main entrance is located on the east end via its attached vestibule or narthex [2]. The vestibule is frame and rests on a concrete foundation. It has a gabled roof clad with asphalt shingles and frame walls clad with wood shingles. Double doors on the east elevation open

<sup>2</sup> Construction on the historic church building began in 1861 but was not complete until the early 1880s.

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under a 6-light pointed arch tympanum featuring intersecting tracery. The vestibule has a concrete foundation. A set of concrete steps leads east down to grade. A datestone on the vestibule's north façade reads "MT. ZION A.M.E. CHURCH – ERECTED 1861 – REMODELED 1901" [8 – Note that this datestone is similar to that in the gable with the exception of the last line.] The vestibule was added when the entrance of the church was switched from the west end to the east end around 1906. Immediately south of the vestibule are concrete steps, sheltered by a gabled porch roof, that access the basement.

The restroom addition, constructed c.1950, is attached to the south elevation [6]. Accessed via steps up from the basement, it has a low profile, reaching up to the sills of two memorial windows. Its shed roof is clad with asphalt shingles, and its walls are stuccoed. Two sets of 2-light horizontal windows on the south elevation represent the only wall openings. The design was sensitive to the historic church building, as it does not cover its main elevations or windows.

#### *Interior [9-13]*

The interior of the church building is comprised of the sanctuary with a small vestibule on the main level and a large fellowship room plus three small partitioned rooms in the basement. The restroom addition was built on a mezzanine level midway between the main and basement levels, enabling natural light and a low profile.

The upper level employs a free span structural system that enables an unobstructed sanctuary space with the chancel area in the western end of the space. [Note: in medieval ecclesiastical terminology, the terms *chancel* and *sanctuary* were used to describe the area where the pulpit and altar were located. Protestants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century expanded the use of the term *sanctuary* to include the general seating area, and it is this alternate definition that is used in this nomination.] The space has a "cathedral" ceiling attached to exposed angled wooden rafters and collar beams [9]. The ceiling and walls are plastered. The flooring is comprised of narrow strips of hardwood, covered with wall-to-wall carpeting.

The sanctuary is a rather plain space occupying the entire upper floor area, very similar to that found in 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist houses of worship. Its main decorative element is the series of stained glass memorial windows. Accessed from the east, the space is divided into two main areas. The eastern two-thirds of the sanctuary comprise the seating area. Pews in the seating area are arranged in two ranks, divided by a central aisle with aisles along the perimeter [10]. The eleven pews in each rank were purchased in the late 1960s; prior to that the building had either removable chairs or benches, as the room also doubled for social activities. The sanctuary is lit by ambient light from the memorial windows described above and by round opaque lighting fixtures that hang from the ceiling by chains. Paired 5-paneled doors provide access from the vestibule to the sanctuary. The doors open under a 6-pane pointed arch transom with stained lights divided by intersecting tracery.

The chancel occupies the west end of the sanctuary and is elevated two steps above the sanctuary's floor level [11]. It is divided into two main areas: the choir area in the northwest corner and the larger pulpit/altar area in the center. The focus of the chancel is the pulpit/altar area, which is raised an additional step above the already elevated chancel floor. This space bows out in a semi-circular shape into the sanctuary. A low railing along the eastern edge of the space (around the curve) defines a semi-circular communion area with a custom-made velvet

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kneeling cushion; the railing features turned balusters. The pulpit, purchased in the 1960s, stands on a raised area behind the communion table (altar). The pulpit is a frame element approximately four feet high with wood veneer sides containing an inlaid cross on the front. The communion table, purchased in 1954, is a narrow rectangular piece of moveable furniture with a slightly concave front bearing the words "In Remembrance of Me" inside a decorative skirt. The table has four legs with chamfered corners. Behind the pulpit are three upholstered chairs; the center chair is noticeably larger than the flanking chairs. An electric light (in the form of a stylized white cross) hangs above the pulpit and is the only real decorative element above the altar. The octagonal font is located immediately southwest of the altar. The choir area in the northwest corner of the chancel is demarcated by three square posts supporting a low velvet curtain hanging on a railing.

In the southwest corner of the sanctuary, narrow wood stairs lead down to the basement. A low railing with turned balustrade lines the north and east sides of the stairs. A small storage cabinet is built into the wall at the top of the stairs (the corner of the room); it is accessed by a single-leaf door hinged to the corner of the room.

The vestibule, built c.1906 on the east end of the building, is a nearly square space measuring 7'10"x7'4". The exterior steps lead up to a set of paired hollow core double doors that open under a six-light pointed arch transom with stained lights divided by intersecting tracery. The vestibule's interior features wood paneling on the walls and ceiling and a carpeted floor. Each side wall features a 7-light Gothic window with Y-tracery and stained lights.

The building has a full basement, accessed by the exterior stairs on the east end and by the interior stairs in the southwest corner [13]. Most of the basement's wall surface is clad with wood veneer paneling (installed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), and the floor is linoleum tile. The basement was originally plastered throughout, with blue beadboard wainscoting, and in some locations the original fabric remains in place. The basement encompasses a fellowship space in the center, a kitchen to the west, and two small offices on the east end. Five square posts in a line running east/west through the center of the main space support the summer beam above. Two doors on the south wall lead into the c.1950 restroom addition.

### **Cemetery**

The cemetery occupies approximately a ½ acre in the center of the property, between the two church buildings [14-15]. Existing markers mostly date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and face either east or west. Among them are several members who served during the Civil War. Burials were arranged in rows running north/south, with markers distributed unevenly. South of the historic church building is the largest concentration of markers, mostly small stones with arched heads and the names and dates of the decedents. The southern half of the burial ground has few markers, mostly concentrated along the outer perimeter. It is thought that the burial ground is full and that the earliest burials are now unmarked.<sup>3</sup>

### **1991 Church Building (noncontributing)**

The "new" church building, constructed in 1991, is located near the south end of the property [16]. It is a substantial building, measuring approximately 50 feet by 200 feet (much larger than

<sup>3</sup> The church historian has a written testimony from a former member that a tombstone formerly had a date in the 1700s. An elderly community member has a similar recollection.

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the earlier church building). Its design reflects the Suburban Plan, the dominant interior layout of houses of worship in the middle and late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the building is mostly rectangular in shape, with a slight point on the north end. The church building has a gabled roof clad with asphalt shingles; its walls are clad with a brick veneer with tall, narrow windows. The main entrance on the east elevation opens into the narthex, a commons area with doors and stairs leading to other parts of the building. Doors on the north side of the narthex open into the sanctuary, the current worship space with a high ceiling supported by laminated ribs over the ranks of pews, which are angled slightly to focus on the pulpit in the north end. Doors on the south side of the narthex lead into a center hall accessing the offices and classrooms. Stairs in the southeast part of the narthex lead to the basement, which is divided into a fellowship space and additional restrooms.

## Integrity

The Mount Zion A.M.E. Church retains its architectural integrity. Because it is being nominated for its significant role during the "School Fight" in the early 1930s [see Section 8], its integrity here is assessed on the basis of its appearance at that time. The church building had been changed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century prior to the School Fight, including its enlargement and re-orientation in the first decade of the century and the installation of the memorial windows in the 1920s. The School Fight meetings were held in the sanctuary, a large open space where later changes have been limited to moveable furniture in the sanctuary (pulpit and benches). National Register specifications in Bulletin 15 (*How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*) states that integrity is the composite of seven aspects of integrity. Each is addressed below.

1. **Location:** Mount Zion A.M.E. Church is still on its original location.
2. **Design:** The overall design of Mount Zion has not changed since the School Fight. The most important change to the building was the installation of the memorial windows in the 1920s, which took place prior to the School Fight. The restroom addition on the south elevation represents a small but necessary alteration to the original plan, but it does not detract from the original building. Furthermore, the building's design is consistent with the changing aesthetics of the African Methodist Episcopal Church regarding the design of its houses of worship.
3. **Setting:** The church building occupies the same location since it was first constructed in the 1860s, with its south elevation overlooking Mount Zion's historic cemetery. The newer church building is located south of the cemetery, and thus does not undermine the historic appearance of the original church/cemetery setting. Since the 1930s when the School Fight took place, parcels surrounding the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church property have been developed for residential purposes; today mature trees and other vegetation lining the adjacent roads buffer much of this development and help maintain the historic setting, as the church was constructed in a wooded area.

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<sup>4</sup> The Suburban Plan is an approach to the design of houses of worship that emerged in the 1950s and survives to this day. Its overall theory is that the main entrance opens into an entry area with multiple doors opening into the other spaces in the building (offices, worship space, classrooms, and powder rooms). In most earlier designs for houses of worship, the worship space defined the building as a whole rather than being treated as one of several components of the design.

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4. **Materials:** The Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building retains most of its original materials. Later materials added to the building are limited to the memorial windows, which date to c.1922 and were already in place by the time of the School Fight.
5. **Workmanship:** The workmanship of the Mount Zion A.M.E. church building is intact. Consistent with A.M.E. aesthetics of the time and economic realities of most suburban Pennsylvania African American congregations, the building has minimal architectural elaboration or ornamentation. The built-in finishes of the building have not been removed or replaced in kind.
6. **Feeling:** The feeling of Mount Zion remains intact. Its design, layout, and ornamentation are consistent with many other A.M.E. church buildings in the Delaware Valley; when taken together, the building provides an excellent sense of its feeling from the time of the School Fight.
7. **Association:** The link between the Mount Zion church building and its significance is strong. It is among the most important buildings associated with the School Fight in Tredyffrin and Easttown Townships, one of the few instances where a local African American community successfully challenged the segregation of local schools prior to the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954.

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## 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.)

- ☒ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black

SOCIAL HISTORY

### Period of Significance

1932-1934

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**Significant Dates**

1932

1934

**Significant Person** (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

African American

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance is 1932-1934, the years that Mount Zion A.M.E. Church played a central role in what was locally known as the "School Fight," in which the church building and its members were the center of resistance and organization against segregation policies of the local school district.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

The property is owned by a religious organization. However, it is significant for its role in Black (African American) and Social History.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church building is significant under National Register Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History for its association with the successful fight against an official local policy of school segregation during its period of significance (1932-1934). The church building and its congregation played a central role in what became known as the "School Fight" as the primary location where the African American community planned strategy to resist the segregation policy and support the local African-American community. Here the African American community developed the means to combat the policy, as instituted by the local school board, including a boycott. The church provided space to organize education for students affected by the boycott, seek legal representation and outside representation, and provide assistance to families impacted by the boycott, whether or not they were members of the congregation. The church building remains largely intact from the time of the School Fight; the most substantial changes to the building had already taken place by that time.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Mount Zion was the center of an important event in African American opposition to school segregation, known locally as the "School Fight." This successful opposition to school segregation in Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships defines the period of significance for Mount Zion (1932-1934). Pennsylvania's public schools had been integrated from the beginning of formal education, but a movement began after World War I to segregate schools. In almost all instances, local efforts by African Americans to restore integrated schools failed; of the few successful efforts, the School Fight in the Easttown/Tredyffrin districts was the most prominent. Only 12 of district's 224 African American students attended public schools during the two years of the School Fight (1932-1934), and during most of the time the African American schools only had a single local student. The significance of the School Fight is discussed in the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission study entitled *Black History in Pennsylvania: Communities in Common*, in the section "The Educational History of African Americans in Pennsylvania."<sup>5</sup>

The *Communities in Common* study explains that since the passage of the Public School Act of 1834, schools in Chester County had been integrated. Two factors, however, spurred segregation in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, the increasing migration of African Americans from the South to northern states such as Pennsylvania fostered prejudice by the white residents. Support for school segregation on the basis of race was usually presented in ways tinged by racism: that segregated schools would promote economic vitality and real estate values. Norman Green, who served on the Tredyffrin School Board, told a *Philadelphia Tribune* reporter during the School Fight that integrated schools would lead to intermarriage, that black students had an inferior capacity for learning, and that the slaves "should never have been freed." White teachers often advocated segregation themselves due to frustration with African American children who transferred in from Southern schools where education for blacks was substandard.<sup>6</sup> Second, during the 1920s, an idea emerged that black students were better educated when taught by African American teachers and white students learned better from white teachers. Reacting to this movement, what is now Cheyney University (13 miles from Mount Zion) became a state normal school in 1922 to train black teachers to take advantage of the increasing number of segregated schools; Cheyney President Leslie P. Hill was widely criticized in the African American community for pursuing this course for his graduates. Beginning in 1930, discussions of school segregation took place in Chester and Delaware Counties. Some school boards arranged for separate classrooms in the same building (such as Downingtown), while others (such as Tredyffrin-Easttown) established separate buildings for black and white students. The number of segregated schools in Pennsylvania at the time is not well documented. It is known that the first segregated high school in Pennsylvania opened in 1934 during the School Fight (in the City of Chester). The *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that in

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<sup>5</sup> *Black History in Pennsylvania: Communities in Common* study of African American historic resources in Pennsylvania, p. 169. (referenced online December 2011-July 2014 at <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/community/18326/education/673926>.) This study originated in 2006 with a Preserve America Grant and was a centerpiece of the PHMC's annual theme in 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Roger D. Thorne, "Segregation on the Upper Main Line: The 'School Fight' of 1932-1934," printed in the *Tredyffrin-Easttown Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Winter 2005), p. 5 [hereinafter referenced as "School Fight"]; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 5/4/1933.

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1932, only 14 Chester County school districts were segregated (out of approximately 60). The annual report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, comprised of 100 pages of charts and tables, did not report on segregated/integrated schools during the 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s. However, an NAACP study in 1948 showed that “more than one quarter of Pennsylvania schools were segregated in some fashion.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1932, the historically integrated schools in the vicinity of Mount Zion became segregated when the school boards for two adjacent districts took collaborative action. In the spring of that year, the recently elected Tredyffrin Township School Board voted to segregate public elementary schools, grades 1-8, and soon thereafter the school board in Easttown Township followed suit (after 98 years of being fully-integrated).<sup>8</sup> The Tredyffrin and Easttown school boards were taking the initial steps towards merging into the current Tredyffrin-Easttown School District, and throughout the School Fight events of 1932-1934, the Tredyffrin School Board took the lead in managing the school districts’ case. By merging and hiring its own superintendent, the Tredyffrin-Easttown School District was re-classified as a Class 3 school district in 1931. The Tredyffrin School Board voted to send white students to the newly constructed Strafford School (built 1930) and Paoli Elementary School (built 1927), while black students would be sent to the older Mount Pleasant School (built 1903).<sup>9</sup> White students in the northern portion of Easttown Township would be sent to the brand new Easttown Elementary School (built 1932) while black students would go to the Lincoln Highway School, formerly called the Berwyn Primary School (built 1912 but in declining condition from having been out of use for several years).<sup>10</sup>

African American opposition to school segregation began immediately, initiating the “School Fight,” also known as the “Berwyn Segregation Case.” Information about the structuring of the proposed segregated school system first appeared in the *Main Line Daily Times* on March 10, 1932.<sup>11</sup> That same day, a local black printer named Primus L. Crosby published a leaflet calling a meeting of the local African American community to discuss the situation. Raised in Alabama, Crosby was familiar with segregation and objected to “Jim Crow schooling;” he was a leader of the School Fight until its resolution. Approximately ten residents came to the initial meeting, held in the “APA Hall” on Lancaster Avenue (home of the United American Protestant Association) across the road from the Berwyn Primary School; the APA Hall was one of the few places in the area that would allow African Americans to hold public meetings. The people who gathered at this first School Fight meeting agreed that because the new state-of-the-art school had been constructed with money from white *and* black taxpayers, students of either race should not be banned from attending any school, new or old. The initial meeting sent a petition to the school

<sup>7</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 5/26/1932, 12/29/1932, 2/22/1934; Thorne, “School Fight,” pp. 3-20; Canton, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Roger D. Thorne, “The Commemoration of the ‘School Fight,’” printed in the *Tredyffrin-Easttown Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (July 2010), p. 49 [hereinafter referenced as “Commemoration”].

<sup>9</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 10/6/1932.

<sup>10</sup> Thorne, “School Fight,” p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Thorne, “School Fight,” p. 6.

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boards, who decided to postpone segregation until the fall term, hoping that African American parents would relent in the interim.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1932, opponents of segregation began monthly meetings. An early issue was the selection of a venue for the meetings. The owners of the APA Hall (where the first meeting was held) had some reservations about allowing the meetings to be held there, although some of its members supported the School Fight. The Robinson Welburn Elks Lodge #794 was an African-American lodge located nearby, but it was not large enough to accommodate the attendance of the monthly meetings, which grew into the hundreds. Beginning that summer, the meetings began to be held at Mount Zion A.M.E. Church; they continued to be held there throughout the School Fight. The Bryn Mawr chapter of the NAACP assisted in the planning of these meetings throughout the two years of the School Fight. At these meetings, recent developments were discussed, legal options were considered, boycott tactics were evaluated, and an action plan for the coming month was adopted.<sup>13</sup>

Although the school boards hoped that the African American community would relent over the summer of 1932, such was not the case. The opening of the 1932-3 school year was delayed until October 3 due to the "prevalence of infantile paralysis (polio)."<sup>14</sup> Once the school year began, the segregation policy went into effect. Black students grades 1-8 were directed to go to the older schools set aside specifically for African American students. White students were directed to the new school buildings. That day, parents and officers of the NAACP carefully guarded Lincoln Highway School in Berwyn and the Mt. Pleasant School in Wayne. Most African American children did not enter. African American students that attempted to attend classes in the new buildings were not provided with desks, books, or pencils, and were forced to stand in the back of classrooms. At this point, most African American parents demonstrated their objection to the school boards' policy by removing their children and boycotting the schools altogether.<sup>15</sup>

Soon thereafter, a lawsuit was brought on behalf of two local black elementary school students, Lillye Marie Tyre of Easttown and Priscilla Temple of Tredyffrin. Both the Tyre and Temple families were members of Mount Zion. The lead counsel for the African American families was Raymond Pace Alexander, a Philadelphia attorney who was serving at the time as president of the National Bar Association (the association of African American lawyers). Alexander later served on the Philadelphia City Council and then became the first African-American judge of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.<sup>16</sup> At that time, there was not an African American attorney in the Chester County Bar, and it seemed very unlikely that any local attorney would take the case. Alexander was not able to file his original motions because he was not a member of the Chester County Bar, but a former district attorney came to his assistance. Two months later, the

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<sup>12</sup> Thorne, "School Fight," p. 14. The initial School Fight meeting was held in the Elks Lodge located at 862 Maple Avenue, Berwyn. In the mid-1940s, the Elks Lodge purchased the brick building on Lancaster Avenue mentioned by Thorne.

<sup>13</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 10/20/1932, 3/16/1933.

<sup>14</sup> Thorne, "School Fight," p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Thorne, "School Fight," p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Legends of the Bar, Philadelphia Bar Association, [www.philadelphiabar.org/page/AboutLegends?appNum=1](http://www.philadelphiabar.org/page/AboutLegends?appNum=1); index to Alexander's papers at the University of Pennsylvania, [www.archives.upenn.edu/faids/upt/upt50/alexander\\_rpa.html](http://www.archives.upenn.edu/faids/upt/upt50/alexander_rpa.html).

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judge issued his decision. As a civil rights lawsuit, the case needed to have the state attorney general, William Schnader, sign the complaint in order for the legal proceedings to continue. The judge also ordered black students to stop attending white schools.<sup>17</sup> With this decision, the School Fight entered a new phase in which African Americans travelled to Harrisburg to lobby Schnader while continuing their boycott of the schools.

The boycott of elementary schools by African American students was supported by almost all African American families. As stated earlier, only 12 of 224 black students attended public schools during the two years of the School Fight (1932-1934), and during most of the time the black schools only had a single local student. The African American community taught school lessons in various places so the students could keep up with their studies. Some students were taught at the Mount Zion parsonage (37 Walnut Avenue in the adjacent village of Berwyn). Most stayed at home to be homeschooled. Still others left the area to stay with relatives to attend schools in those locations with no such segregation policies.<sup>18</sup>

During the boycott, monthly meetings at Mount Zion grew in attendance; often, the church building was "standing room only." One of these meetings, held on March 14, 1933 featured speeches by Roy Wilkins, assistant secretary of the national NAACP and Joseph H. Rainey, editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a newspaper which continues to serve the African American community in an around Philadelphia.<sup>19</sup> Among the other dignitaries who addressed the School Fight meetings was U.S. Rep. Oscar DePriest from Chicago, the first African American to serve in Congress from a state outside of the South; Walter White, executive director of the NAACP; and Daisy Lampkin, Pittsburgh NAACP, the first woman to be elected to the national board of the NAACP and the first field regional secretary for the organization. There were no white speakers at the meetings, and few white people attended the School Fight meetings.<sup>20</sup>

In 1933, actions on the part of the Tredyffrin School Board against the African American community intensified. On April 4th, the Board voted to enforce the state compulsory school act. Notices were sent to parents and guardians of black students, warning them that they would be jailed if they did not send their children to school. The school year was nearly over, and the Board calculated (again) that black parents would relent over the summer. When that did not happen, arrests of parents began in October of the 1933-4 school year. Altogether, 17 parents were charged and ten convicted. One of the four African Americans arrested on the first day was Charles Shepard, a lay minister at Mount Zion. Convicted parents were jailed for five days. Arrests continued for one month but ended abruptly when an African American woman, Mrs. Lillian Williams, with her infant child, volunteered to go to jail in place of her husband, who could not miss work. The thought of a mother and infant child in jail was too much for even the School Board to stand behind, and arrests ceased.<sup>21</sup> The situation became dire for some families when

<sup>17</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 10/13/1932, 12/15/1932.

<sup>18</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 3/23/1933; Thorne, "School Fight," p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 3/16/1933.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Bessie Whitney and Elsie Fuller, 10/23/2012. Whitney and Fuller were high school students at the time of the School Fight. Whitney was a daughter of Primus Crosby and attended School Fight meetings.

<sup>21</sup> Thorne, "School Fight," p. 15ff.

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jobs were lost due to the incarcerations. To offset loss of income, the African American community organized to provide cooked meals for families to offset the loss of income.<sup>22</sup>

The School Fight is reflected in the statistics printed in the annual report of the Pennsylvania Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Superintendent reported in 1934 that the Tredyffrin Easttown School District had 1,694 students; the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported in late 1932 that there were 224 African American students in the district (13% of the whole). One of the tables in the annual report of the state Superintendent included statistics on absences; this information is included on a chart in the additional documentation of this nomination. The number of absences in the Tredyffrin Easttown School District usually averaged 22,000, or 13 missed days per student. The number of absences increased from 22,416 for the 1931-32 school year to 65,760 for the 1932-33 school year. Following complaints by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Tredyffrin Easttown school board apparently found ways to under-report absences for the 1933-34 school year, reporting only 32,733 absences. Beginning with the following year, absences returned to their normal levels around 22,000.<sup>23</sup>

The School Fight became an issue in the elections of 1934. That year, Pennsylvania Republicans were defending the governorship and a U.S. Senate seat, and the party had a divisive primary for both seats. Rev. W.L. (William Lester) Johnson, a NAACP member who had been assigned to Mount Zion as pastor a few months after the School Fight began and stayed one year, wrote an open letter to Governor Gifford Pinchot that was published in the November 11, 1933, issue of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. Johnson warned the Governor, who was a U.S. Senate contender, "The 500,000 Negroes of Pennsylvania will vote against you solidly unless you at once and without delay end this illegally established 'Jim Crow' school system that exists in Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships." A mass-based civil rights protest was planned for March 11, 1934, in Philadelphia (two months before the primary), to be called "Berwyn School Segregation Protest Day." The threat of Philadelphia's largest civil rights demonstration at that time was recognized as a major turning point, although the protest did not occur because the police commissioner rescinded the demonstration permit for fears it would increase racial tension and interrupt city traffic.<sup>24</sup>

The School Fight ended in the spring of 1934 as the result of an unexpected turn of events. Pennsylvania Attorney General William Schnader, who had been unwilling to sign the civil rights lawsuit back in the fall of 1932 when the School Fight first began, signed onto the complaint in April, 1934, and appointed two special attorneys to handle the case. Mount Zion parents had visited Schnader in Harrisburg several times, asking him to sign on to the complaint per the Chester County judge's decision. At the time, Schnader was locked in a tight three-way race for the Republican nomination for Governor; he believed he could get black support by signing onto

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Whitney and Fuller.

<sup>23</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12/29/1932; *Statistical Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Department of Public Instruction, 1932-1936).

<sup>24</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune* on November 11, 1933. David Canton, "A Dress Rehearsal for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Berwyn, Pennsylvania, School Desegregation Case, 1932-1935." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Volume 75, Number 2, Spring 2008, page 275. This is the official journal of the Pennsylvania Historical Association (PHA). Berwyn is the village immediately west of Devon, and African American students living there were directed to attend the Mount Pleasant School.

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the suit. Schnader chose a date three weeks prior to the primary to support the School Fight, enough time to energize black Republicans for the primary while minimizing any white Republican backlash. The two local school boards realized that they would likely lose the civil suit once Schnader had signed on with the plaintiffs, and they agreed to end segregation voluntarily.<sup>25</sup> By ending local segregation voluntarily, the school boards prevented the case from going to a judge who might issue a ruling to integrate all schools in Pennsylvania. Other segregated schools were not integrated until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. Altogether, the boycott lasted twenty-five months; African American children returned to school on April 30, 1934. However, the students lost over 300 days from their school education. When primary day arrived, Schnader won his three-way primary with 46%, though in the end he lost the general election.

The School Fight had several ramifications. Locally speaking, the 224 African American students were able to return to integrated schools and continue their education. David Canton wrote an article for *Pennsylvania History* that identified three significant outcomes:

1. The case assisted in the passing of the Pennsylvania Equal Rights Bill in 1935, which outlawed policies to limit access by African Americans to restaurants, entertainment businesses, and public transportation;
2. The NAACP realized the importance of expanding their coalition-building activities, and,
3. The civil rights strategies used by the African American families were a “dress rehearsal” for the modern Civil Rights movement: “a boycott, jail-ins, mass meetings, interracial cooperation, threats of mass protests that were effective even when they did not occur, tensions between local and national civil rights leaders, alliances with and fear of the left, and white backlash.”<sup>26</sup>

There were many people involved in organizing and carrying forth the School Fight. One such person was Crystal Bird Fauset. When the School Fight began, she had just earned her teacher’s certificate from Columbia. She went to work in 1932 organizing the Colored Women’s Activities Club, which was the first organization for African American women in the area (there were no social clubs or organizations such as the Elks or Masons for African American women in the Mount Zion area at that time). Although she lived in Philadelphia, she attended many meetings at Mount Zion, and the Colored Women’s Activities Club was one of several organizations that helped raise money for the School Fight expenses. Fauset later served as the first African American woman in any state legislature, representing the 18<sup>th</sup> district (Philadelphia). Throughout her career, Fauset worked to bridge the racial divide – working at various times for Eleanor Roosevelt, both national political parties (not simultaneously), religious organizations, and the World Affairs Council. Although Fauset had worked for racial harmony

<sup>25</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, 4/6/1933, 4/13/1933, 3/29/1934; Thorne, “School Fight,” pp. 8-16.

<sup>26</sup> David Canton, “A Dress Rehearsal,” published in *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 75, no. 2 (2008), pp. 277-279; Kenneth W. Mack, “Law and Mass Politics in the Making of the Civil Rights Lawyer, 1931-1941,” *The Journal of American History* (Jun 2006), pp. 37-62.

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prior to the School Fight, it was during this time that she learned skills that she would take to other endeavors of her life.<sup>27</sup>

The School Fight went largely ignored, forgotten or unknown for over half a century, overshadowed by the Brown case of 1954. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a story about the School Fight in 2004. Local historian and president of the Tredyffrin-Easttown History Club (now called the Tredyffrin-Easttown Historical Society) Roger D. Thorne commented:

On May 16, 2004, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published an excellent article exposing this subject for public scrutiny. I was (and continue as) president of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society, the oldest community history organization on the Upper Main Line. I frequently act as the 'come-to' person on matters of local history, and yet, as I read this article – with increasing incredulity – I was clueless about this incident. How could an event of this significance, happening not in the Deep South but on Philadelphia's Upper Main Line, have been totally disregarded as a topic of serious study by our organization? I resolved to remedy that deficiency.<sup>28</sup>

Thorne got to work. He wrote an article on the School Fight that was published in the quarterly historical journal of the Tredyffrin-Easttown History Club in 2005. The article was the impetus for additional research and other activities. Thorne gave lectures on the School Fight, and in 2008 David Canton's article appeared in *Pennsylvania History*. On May 8, 2010, Mount Zion organized a "Commemoration of the School Segregation Fight in Tredyffrin and Easttown Townships, Chester County, Pa., 1932 – 1934" event to keep alive the memory of the local show of strength and courage. Two elderly African American women gave remarks on the impact of the School Fight on their lives, and the daughter of Hon. Raymond Pace Alexander reported on its role in his legal career. Other participants included an historian, a civil rights leader and educator, a local politician, and A.M.E. officials.<sup>29</sup> The event was an important step in raising awareness of the School Fight. Among the outcomes from the commemoration were the following:

- Front page article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on four students of the School Fight, then in their 80s and 90s
- Radio interview of five former students on Temple University's WRTI-FM Radio Station
- Article in the local Conestoga High School's (Berwyn, PA) school newspaper
- Individual and group audio and video interviews by several high school students retained for school archives
- Articles and photos in the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society's *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*, July 2010

<sup>27</sup> Website <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/fauset-crystal-bird-1894-1965>, accessed 11/19/2012.

<sup>28</sup> Roger D. Thorne, "Commemoration," p. 49; Diane Mastrull and Dale Mezzacappa, "The Great Divide: Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, our region's schools are neither integrated nor equal," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 16, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Meghan Morris, "Remembering segregation fight," *The Spoke Newspaper*, Conestoga High School, Berwyn, Pa, June 7, 2010; Bertha L. Jackmon, "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, Devon, Pa Commemorates a Little-Known Civil Rights Victory," *First District Flame*. (Official Publication of the First Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Church), Fall 2010 issue, p. 21; Roger D. Thorne, "School Fight," pp. 3-20; Canton, "Dress Rehearsal."

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- Inclusion of information on the case in the Tredyffrin Easttown School District local history curriculum (at teacher's discretion, with the suggestion of it being a topic in all grades)<sup>30</sup>

#### *Historic Resources Related to the School Fight*

Eleven buildings have been identified that played a role of some kind in the School Fight. The list includes six school buildings, two houses, two social halls, and two houses of worship. The six school buildings include three that educated white students during the two years of segregation, two that were set aside for educating black students, and one that was closed upon the completion of one of the white-only schools. The two school boards met at the high school, which were integrated throughout the School Fight.

The three schools for white students were Easttown Elementary, Strafford Elementary, and Paoli Elementary. It was the completion of Easttown Elementary School (located at the intersection of Bridge Street and First Avenue in Berwyn) that precipitated the School Fight, as the Easttown school board decided before it opened that African American children would not attend there. Ironically, that schoolhouse was demolished in 2011 and is the only historic building associated with the School Fight that no longer exists. The other two all-white schools were constructed in 1927 (Paoli Elementary School, located at 19 East Central Avenue, now the Delaware Valley Friends School) and 1930 (Strafford Elementary School, located at 445 Upper Gulph Road, today's Woodlynde School). The latter two schools were constructed as nearly identical buildings with Colonial Revival style ornamentation. Both have been converted into private schools. Although they have been greatly expanded, the historic cores remain largely intact.

The two schools set aside for African American children were the existing Berwyn Primary School (called the Lincoln Highway School during the School Fight) and the Mount Pleasant School. The two buildings share a similar history: constructed during the early wave of consolidation of one-room schoolhouses, they were phased out as newer schools were constructed, set aside as schools for African American children during segregation, then converted into office buildings in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Berwyn School (built 1912) had been out of use prior to the school fight and already suffered from deferred maintenance. It is located at the intersection of Central and Lancaster Avenues in Berwyn, two tenths of a mile from the Easttown Elementary School (1932-2011). The Berwyn School was sold around 1939 and converted to offices; its interior was completely renovated c.1990. The Mount Pleasant School was constructed in 1903 at 1008 Upper Gulph Road near the eastern end of Tredyffrin Township. The building was in declining condition by the time of the Depression, at which time the white students were consolidated into other schools. The African American teacher at Mount Pleasant taught a dozen students at various points during the School Fight, only one of which was a resident in the district; the others were living temporarily with relatives. The school district sold the building around the time of World War II, and its interior was reconfigured into office space.

The last of the six schools is the North Berwyn School. It is located on the southeast corner of Howellville and Conestoga Roads in Berwyn, half a mile north of the Berwyn Primary School. This was one of several schools that had been integrated prior to the School Fight. The school

<sup>30</sup> Jackmon, "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church Commemorates...", passim.

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board closed the North Berwyn School as a part of the consolidation of primary schools that was taking place just as the School Fight began. After the end of the School Fight, the school board elevated the school to two stories and relocated its vocational and art departments here; a new school was constructed on the west side of Howellville Road opposite the building. It is the least intact of the five remaining school buildings.

Two houses were identified that played a significant role in the School Fight. Both are located in Berwyn, in close proximity to each other, and both retain their general form despite having been re-clad with composite materials in recent years. The first is the former Mount Zion A.M.E. parsonage, located at 37 Walnut Street, 250 feet south of the Berwyn Primary School. The parsonage is a 2-story Late Victorian building with three gables, a complicated roof system, a wrap porch, and a center chimney. The Mount Zion congregation held its own school in the parsonage during the School Fight. The second is the Primus Crosby House, located at 832 Maple Avenue. The Crosby House is a 2.5-story vernacular building with a front end gabled orientation. The house formerly had a rear wing where the print shop, The Eagle Press, was located, but the section containing Crosby's print shop burned around 1970. As stated, Primus Crosby was one of the primary leaders of the School Fight, and the flyers he printed were a chief means of alerting the African American community about speakers at upcoming meetings.

Two social halls that contributed to the School Fight were the UAPA Hall (locally called APA Hall) and a local Elks Lodge. The APA Hall was the meeting place for the United American Protestant Association, located at 821 Lancaster Avenue across the road from the Berwyn Primary School. The first School Fight meeting was held here. Today the building is used for commercial purposes; an entrance canopy has been added onto the main entrance and a large bay window was added onto the elevation facing onto Lancaster Avenue. The other social hall was the meeting hall of the Robinson Wellburn Elks Lodge #794 (located at 862 Maple Avenue in Berwyn). The 2.5-story frame building consists of an L-shaped core with a 2-story shed addition off the east elevation. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the building was re-clad with synthetic siding and the front porch enclosed. The Elks Lodge was the only African American social organization in the area at the time of the School Fight, and its members were active in planning strategy. The building was not used for holding School Fight meetings because of its location off the main roads and because it could not accommodate the crowds that came to the organizational meetings. Note: this building was sold by the Elks in the 1940s, at which time they purchased a brick building on Lancaster Avenue. It is this second lodge building that appears in the articles on the School Fight, although it was not associated with the Elks in the early 1930s.<sup>31</sup>

Two African American houses of worship were involved with the School Fight. An African American Baptist congregation now called First Baptist Church of Wayne had been formed at Mount Pleasant during the 1920s and constructed a church building on a parcel adjacent to the Mount Pleasant School. One student who boycotted school during the School Fight worshipped there. Contemporary accounts do not mention any School Fight events being held at the Baptist church, although it is possible that the building played some role. It is a 1-story stuccoed house of worship with an appearance remarkably similar to Mount Zion: a rectangular building with an attached narthex, pointed arch windows on the side walls, and a full basement.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with John Tunnell, longtime member of the Robinson Wellburn Elks Lodge, November 14, 2012.

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The remaining building associated with the School Fight is the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building. The Church building played a critical role during the School Fight. Its size, convenient location, as well as its active and willing congregation gave it a central role in the School Fight. Here, monthly meetings were held to organize the African American community to fight the school boards' decision through the boycott as well as legal action. In addition, its members created a network that reached out to and supported those most affected by the School Fight. The original legal complaint was brought by two of its members, and several of its members were jailed during the period when parents were sentenced for not sending their children to the segregated schools. The Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building stands out as a clearly important historic resource associated with the School Fight.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

Mount Zion was the first organized African American religious congregation in Tredyffrin Township and on the entire "Main Line" in suburban Philadelphia.<sup>32</sup> It is also the only African American church of any denomination on the Main Line that has a church cemetery. The Church has been active in the struggles of its communicants for the past 165 years. The older church building (the main subject of this survey form) was completed c.1880, renovated in 1901-1903, and according to the datestone, rebuilt in 1906. It currently serves as a meeting place for community events and worship services. A new church was constructed on the same property in 1991, and the congregation has met there since then.

**Early History**

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) was the first Methodist Christian denomination formed by and for African Americans, although it was open to all of the community. In 1793, two black preachers of St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia led all but a few of the African American parishioners out of the church over the final of many injustices, a segregated seating dispute. Two African Americans were forced to interrupt their praying while on their knees and move from the main floor to the newly built gallery: William White, a prominent church member, and Absalom Jones, who later became the first black Episcopal priest. Among the African Americans who walked out was also Richard Allen, an African American who was the minister of the early morning services at St. George's.<sup>33</sup> The group of African-Americans who left St.

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<sup>32</sup> Laura E. Beardsley, *Historic Photos of The Main Line* (Turner Publishing Company, 2008), page 1 [Note: The Main Line is about a 15 mile stretch of communities west of Philadelphia between Overbrook and Paoli along Route 30, and it retained its name from the state-owned Main Line of Public Works, a railroad and canal system, started in 1834]; Rev Jeane B. Williams, "Presentation at African-American Historical and Cultural Museum, April 24, 1999," p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Rev Jeane B. Williams, "Richard Allen: from the Free African Society to Bethel A.M.E. Church", *Annals of Eastern Pennsylvania, Journal of the Historical Society and the Commission on Archives and History of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church*, 2010, Number 7, p. 66. Website <http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/spring97/allen.html>. Reprinted from James A. Henretta, Elliot Brownlee, David Brody, Susan Ware, and Marilyn Johnson, *America's History*, Third Edition, Worth Publishers Inc., 1997 Copyright: Worth Publishers Inc. p. 2; and First Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church "Our Name", <http://www.firstdistrictame.org/abouttheamechurch.html>. [Note: Although Henretta has the year of the famous segregated seating incident as 1792, and Williams has it as 1793, both are different from most accounts which use the year 1787.]

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George's that day formed two congregations: one Episcopal and one Methodist. Allen was a founder of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794. In 1816, Allen and leaders of four other black Methodist congregations met in Philadelphia and established the African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination.<sup>34</sup>

The congregation at what is now Mount Zion began with cottage prayer meetings in private homes in 1849 and was later identified by its geographic location as the New Centreville A.M.E. Church. The New Centreville Church first met approximately one mile northeast of the current location, in an area known then as "Hammer Hollow." Worship was originally held in the home of Sarah and Henry Roach, near the village of Strafford. Nelson Hughes was the first minister. New Centreville A.M.E. Church was part of several circuits at various times. Two of the earliest known were the Centreville Circuit which was comprised of Phoenixville, Centreville and Valley Hill (East Whiteland Township), and the Oxford Circuit. Other circuits included Norristown, Malvern, West Chester and Bryn Mawr, all in Pennsylvania.<sup>35</sup> The congregation met in various homes, then in a vacated shop prior to constructing the core of the current building in 1861. The church was re-named in 1901 and rebuilt the church building soon thereafter.<sup>36</sup>

### The Church Building

In the mid-1850s, the growing congregation elected to construct a house of worship. In 1856, it purchased 79.45 square perches (slightly less than ½ acre) of land from Jonathan Lewis<sup>37</sup> on the east side of a road now called Berwyn Baptist Road (Chester County Deed Book C6-125-502). The following month, a second deed was filed on behalf of Lewis's wife Mary Ann, since the two parties had overlooked her when the earlier deed was filed (Chester County Miscellaneous Deed Book 9-174). At that time, the property was located in a heavily wooded portion of Tredyffrin Township (as shown on historic maps). The Bethel Bacton Hill (later called Ebenezer) A.M.E. Church in the Valley Hill area of East Whiteland Township was similarly constructed in a heavily wooded area – possibly because land in wooded areas was more affordable.

Construction of the first New Centreville church building began in 1861 (it was renamed Mount Zion in 1901). Rev. Nelson Hughes was the pastor. Work stopped during the Civil War because many male members left to serve in the Union Army and Navy. Work resumed on the building under Rev. Charles W. Boardley (1872-1880)<sup>38</sup> and was completed under Rev. W.H. Davis (1880-1882).<sup>39</sup> The land south of the church was laid out for the congregation's burial ground.

In the first decade of the 20th century, several major changes took place. In 1901, during the pastorate of Rev. Elijah Byrd (1901-1903), the congregation was transferred from the Lancaster

<sup>34</sup> Church History, Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
<http://www.motherbethel.org/content.php?cid=112>

<sup>35</sup> "Walk of Faith for 176 Years", Church History for Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, Norristown, Pa. Souvenir Program Booklet, *Celebrating 176 Years of Faith*, 1830-2006, July 16, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> John B. Jones, *Program Booklet, Ninetieth Anniversary, Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church (Devon, Pa.), October 29, 1939*.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan T. Lewis was a member of the Wilberforce Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1837 by Rev. Leonard Fletcher, Baptist Church in the Great Valley (BCGV), a Church less than one mile away, with residents of Berwyn and Wayne. BCGV Church Records and brochures.

<sup>38</sup> Kay Raftery, "Church beginnings are traced to 1849," article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9/28/1994.

<sup>39</sup> "The History of Mount Zion A. M. E. Church," manuscript history detailing events up to 2004.

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District Conference to the Philadelphia District Conference within the First Episcopal District (oldest Episcopal District) in African Methodism, which has been and still is responsible for assigning pastors to the congregation. In September 1901, the church's name was changed from New Centreville A.M.E. Church to Mount Zion A.M.E. Church.

The second major change was the renovation and rebuilding of the church building. Rev. I.H.W. West (1898-1901) began the process of raising funds to rebuild the church,<sup>40</sup> due to its increasing membership. During Rev. Byrd's pastorate, the building was renovated and expanded.<sup>41</sup> It re-opened between August and November 1901. Expenditures were listed in the church's Quarterly Conference Record, dated November 2, 1901.<sup>42</sup> The existing building has two datestones, one with the words "Rebuilt 1906." The 1906 date was listed, probably because Rev. Charles H. Fareira (1903-1908) put in a basement, making the church complete. Railroad atlases (see Historic Maps section below) appear to show that the size of the building increased noticeably in the years between 1900 and 1908. Originally, the building faced west onto Berwyn Baptist Road; during the renovations, the building was re-oriented such that the present entrance faces east<sup>43</sup> onto Fairfield Road. A vestibule or narthex was built on the east end to access the sanctuary. In the early 1920s, the church initiated a program of selling subscriptions for stained glass memorial windows, in an effort to pay off debt. Fourteen windows were installed; names of honorees and the donors are included on the lower panel of most windows. The church's Quarterly Conference Record, dated January 18, 1926, listed an expenditure for "windows."<sup>44</sup>

Small renovation campaigns took place throughout the 20th century. A restroom addition was constructed off the lower level on the south elevation circa 1950, during the pastorate of Rev. Samuel B. Randolph (1947-1953) after the original privies were stolen and used for fuel during the local high school bonfire for the Thanksgiving Day football game. In 1954, the church purchased a new communion table and new choir chairs. In the 1960s, new pulpit chairs were purchased and the kneeling pad was re-upholstered. Later in the decade, the pulpit was replaced and new pews were purchased. A small spire (or steeple) was constructed on the ridge near the east end of the building in 1972-1973. This was a change in the exterior

<sup>40</sup> *Mount Zion A.M.E. Church Ninetieth Anniversary Program Booklet*, Church History. October 29, 1939.

<sup>41</sup> Church Quarterly Conference Records, Aug 2, 1901; Richard R. Wright, Jr. *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1816-1916*, page 55. Rev. Elijah Byrd (1901-1903). "May 19, 1901, he was appointed to Devon, Pa., and found a church not large enough to hold the people so it was necessary to tear out and extend the building and make it large enough to accommodate the people. This was done at the cost of \$1500, and all of this was paid but \$252." Membership under Rev. Byrd increased from 103 to 119.

<sup>42</sup> Church Quarterly Conference Records, Nov. 2, 1901.

<sup>43</sup> Facing East: Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism have adopted the practice of facing east during prayer or service for various reasons ranging from Jerusalem is in the East, Christ will return in the East, the holy Temple will be rebuilt in the East, the sun rises in the East, to Buddha sat facing east beneath a tree when he noticed the morning star and experienced great enlightenment.

<http://fiercebuddhist.wordpress.com/2011/04/20/buddhist-home-shrine/> ;

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index/?qid=20081002125833AAQYFGf> ;

<http://answers.yourdictionary.com/religion/why-face-east-in-prayer.html> .

<sup>44</sup> Church Quarterly Conference Records, Jan. 18, 1926.

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appearance of the original building; traditionally, A.M.E. churches did not have steeples. The steeple / spire was removed in 2003 after being damaged during a storm.<sup>45</sup>

In 1991, a new church building was constructed south of the burial ground. Congregants had been raising funds for the new building as early as the 1970s. After the new church was completed, the pulpit and the pulpit chairs purchased in the 1950s for the older church were moved into the basement of the new church building, where they remained until they were returned to the old church in mid-2012.

### Context of A.M.E. Religious Architecture

The Mount Zion A.M.E. Church is typical of the type of A.M.E. church buildings constructed in eastern Pennsylvania in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The book *The First Episcopal District's Historical Review of 200 Years of African Methodism*<sup>46</sup> provides information and photographs that establishes a context of these houses of worship.

A.M.E. Church design in the 19th century followed the early Methodist precedents. Prior to the Gothic Revival movement, Methodist houses of worship were restrained in decoration, in keeping with the Puritan ideals that dominated American religious architecture from the beginning of European settlement until the mid-19th century. The earliest Methodist houses of worship (then called "meeting houses" – as was Mount Zion) followed the common "Chapel Plan," a front end gabled building with a highly longitudinal oriented interior.

This type of restrained architecture is evident on the earliest known A.M.E. Church buildings in Pennsylvania. The Bethlehem A.M.E. Church in Langhorne, constructed in 1851<sup>47</sup> is one of the oldest A.M.E. church buildings in Pennsylvania. The simple 1-story, 3-bay, rectangular building features a front end gabled orientation and large, multi-light windows. The building has no pointed arch or arched-headed windows, although later sections added to the core introduced these elements. Many A.M.E. churches followed this pattern, including those in Pottsville (1868), Swedesboro, New Jersey (rebuilt 1887), Shippensburg (1892), and Mercersburg (1890s).<sup>48</sup> It is likely that the original Mount Zion church building had a similar appearance as these early buildings (prior to the 1906 rebuilding). In the latter half of the 19th century, larger A.M.E. congregations began to build Chapel Plan houses of worship with full basements, used for scripture studies and common meals. The design is sometimes called the "raised" Chapel Plan because the main worship area is elevated and accessed by a formal stairway on the main (usually) gable end. One of the earliest such "raised" Chapel Plan A.M.E. churches was built in Carlisle in 1867. The Campbell A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia was rebuilt in 1870 with a similar

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Logan, Illustrator, "Old A.M.E. Church" and "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church." For Ruth J. Moore's article, "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church", printed in the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Vol.4, Issue 1, pp 14-17, January 1941.

<sup>46</sup> *The First Episcopal District's Historical Review of 200 Years of African Methodism* (Philadelphia: First Episcopal District, A.M.E. Church, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> Rev Jeane B. Williams, A.M.E. Pastor, Retired, Historian. A.M.E. Philadelphia Conference Historiographer, Certificates for May 20, 1984, December 1, 1984 and May 26, 1985.

<sup>48</sup> *The First Episcopal District's Historical Review of 200 Years of African Methodism* (Philadelphia: First Episcopal District, A.M.E. Church, 1987), pp. 160-203, 392.

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appearance, though the tall windows on the upper level have arched heads.<sup>49</sup> Thus when Mount Zion Church was rebuilt in 1906, it replicated this second phase of A.M.E. religious architecture.

The Mount Zion A.M.E. Church clearly falls into the second phase of A.M.E. religious architecture. Its front end gabled orientation, with a Chapel Plan interior over a full basement, reflects trends in A.M.E. religious architecture that began among larger, urban, A.M.E. congregations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and dominated A.M.E. church construction in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The church buildings are more rectangular in shape, with a Chapel Plan worship space over a useable basement. During this time, Methodists relented on their earlier objection to pointed arch windows as well as their objection to stained glass windows. Mount Zion was one of several congregations that inserted stained glass memorial windows into their existing houses of worship; Bethel A.M.E. Church in Lancaster also followed this path during these years.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, new A.M.E. church buildings entered a third general phase. New church construction followed contemporary religious architecture plans, particularly the Suburban Plan, which features a common entrance area / narthex that accesses the sanctuary, offices, classrooms, and other sections of the building. The current Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building is a typical example of the Suburban Plan.

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<sup>49</sup> 200 Years of African Methodism, pp. 160-168.

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Church History, Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
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#### *Interviews*

Interview with Bessie Whitney and Elsie Fuller at Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, 11/23/2012. Notes on the conversation are on file in the Wise Preservation Planning LLC office, and the interview was taped and transcribed.

Interview with John Tunnell, longtime member of the Robinson Wellburn Elks Lodge, November 14, 2012. Notes on the conversation are on file in the Wise Preservation Planning LLC office.

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#### **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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** NA

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## **10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 1.4 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

#### **UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 18 Easting: 462971 Northing: 4434104

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the property is the same as tax parcel 43-10D-13-E and is shown on the accompanying site plan (Map 1).

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the property historically owned by the church. Adjacent properties are residential and not associated with the significance of this nomination.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Robert J. Wise, Jr., President; Seth Hinshaw, Senior Planner  
organization: Wise Preservation Planning LLC  
street & number: 1480 Hilltop Road  
city or town: Chester Springs state: PA zip code: 19425  
e-mail: bwise@wisepres.com  
telephone: (484) 202-8187  
date: 11/21/2014

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location. **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building  
City or Vicinity: Tredyffrin Township  
County: Chester State: Pennsylvania  
Photographer: Wise Preservation Planning LLC  
Date Photographed: 9/22 and 11/13/2012

Mount Zion A.M.E. Church

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Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photo 1 of 17. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, east and north elevations.
- Photo 2. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, east façade with narthex or vestibule in foreground
- Photo 3. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, north elevation.
- Photo 4. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, north and west elevations.
- Photo 5. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, west and south elevations.
- Photo 6. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, south elevation.
- Photo 7. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, datestone in east gable.
- Photo 8. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, datestone on front steps.
- Photo 9. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church: interior, facing west from the entrance.
- Photo 10. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church: interior, facing east from the chancel.
- Photo 11. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church: interior, detail of chancel, facing west.
- Photo 12. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church: interior, detail of a memorial window.
- Photo 13. Mount Zion A.M.E. Church: interior, basement, facing northeast.
- Photo 14. Mount Zion A.M.E. Cemetery, facing north (with historic church building in background).
- Photo 15. Mount Zion A.M.E. Cemetery, facing southwest.
- Photo 16. New Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church (noncontributing), facing southeast

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mount Zion AME Church

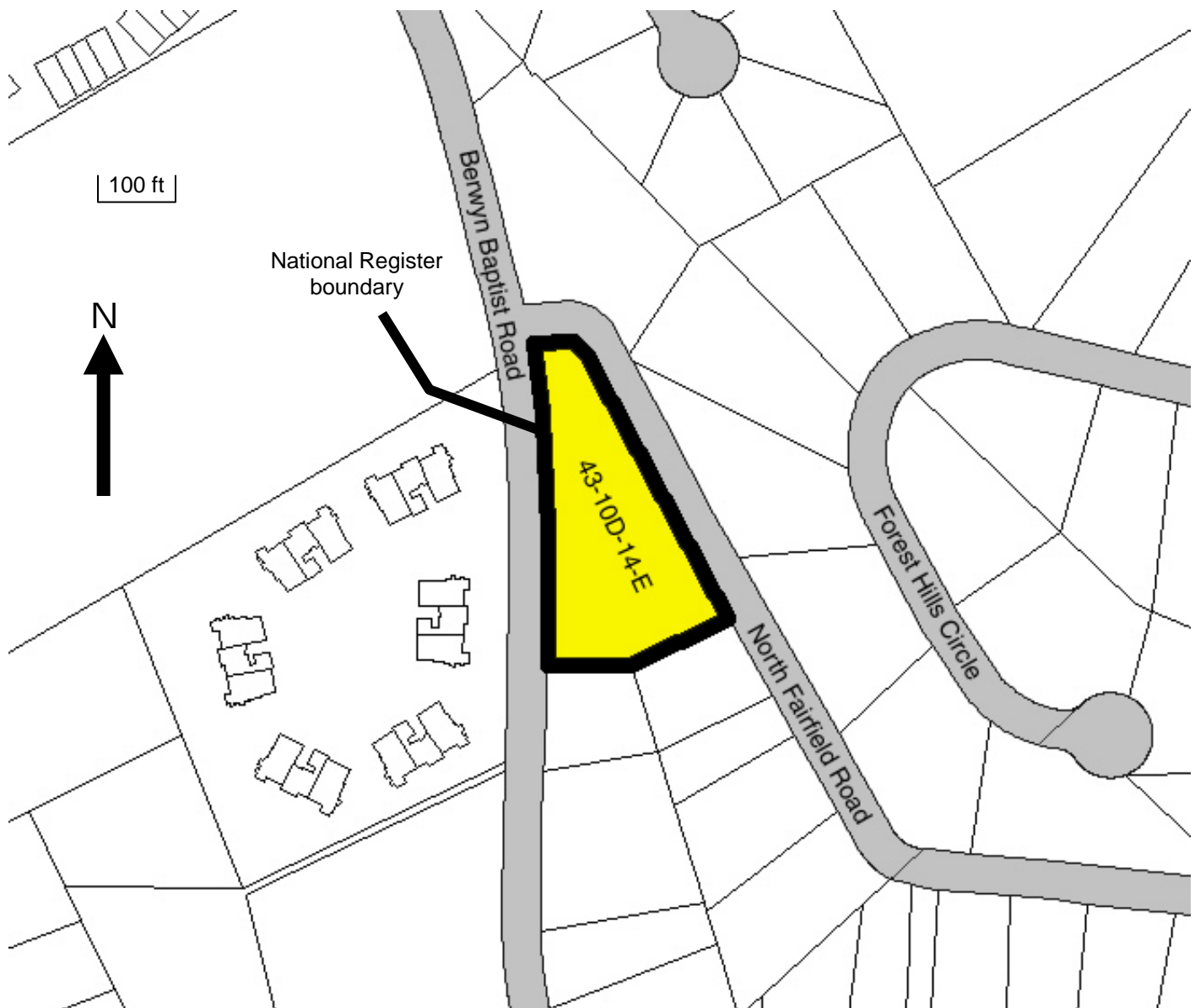
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### Tax Parcel Map.



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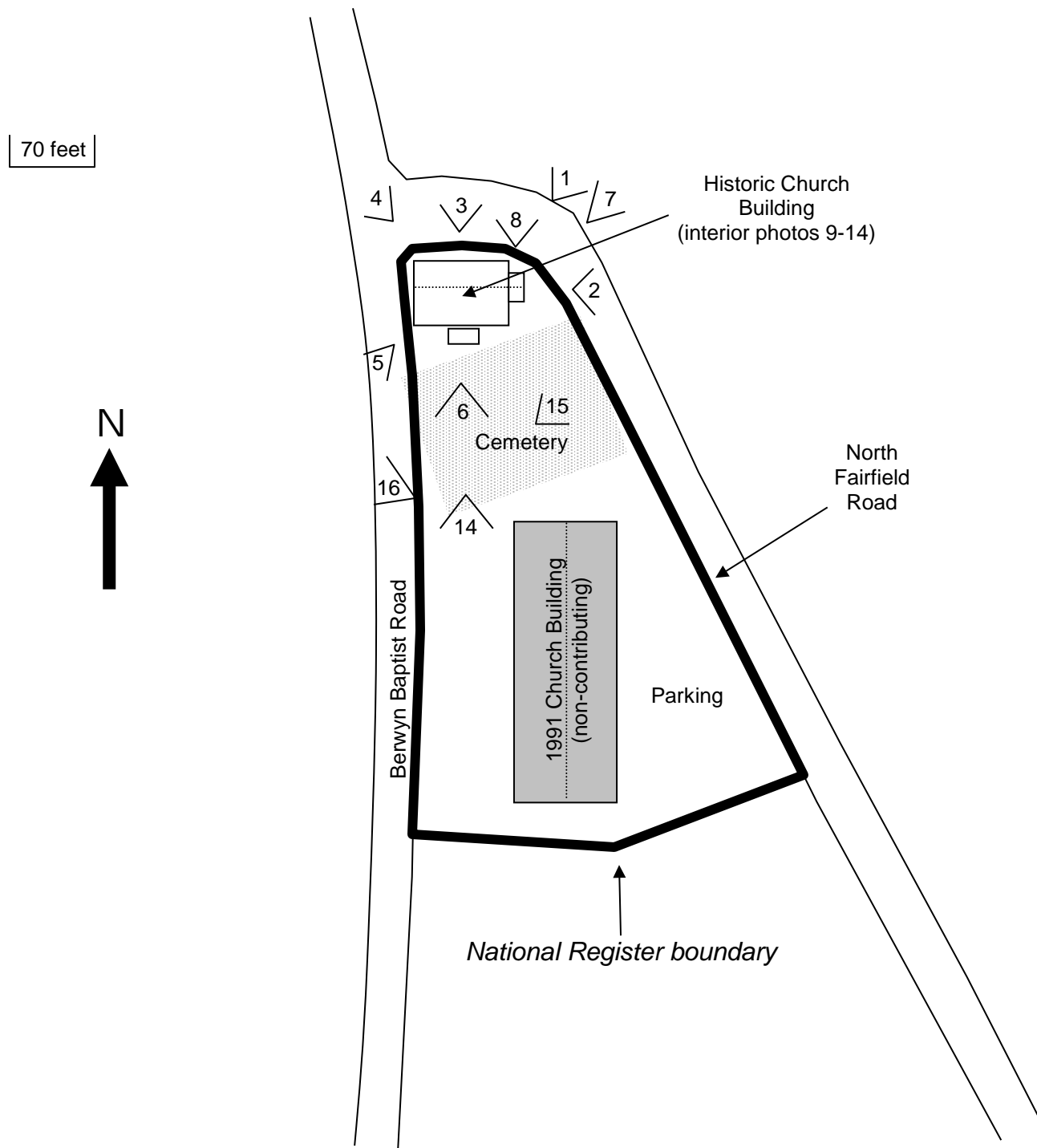
Name of Property  
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**SITE PLAN** (numbers in brackets represent camera angles):



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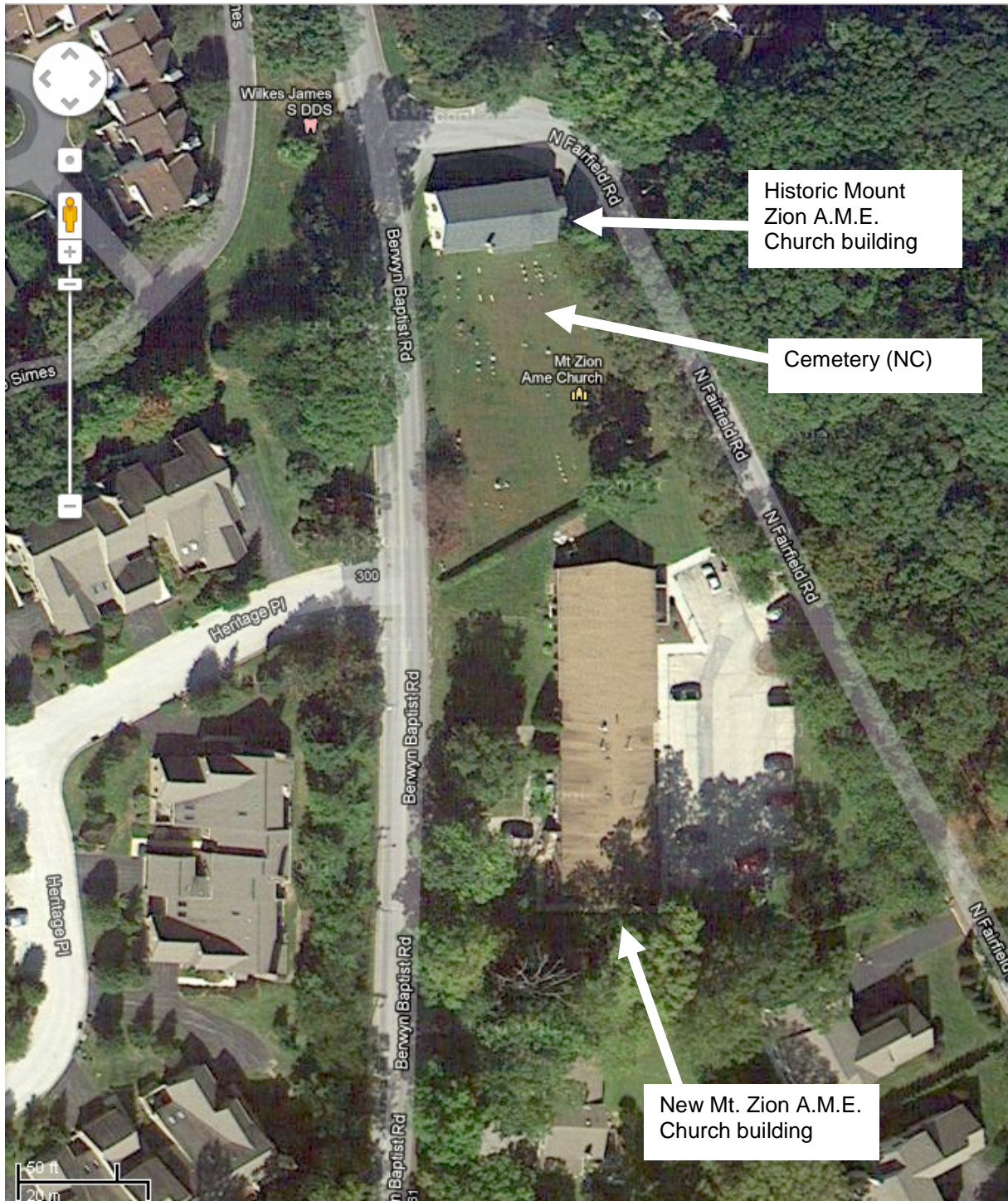
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Aerial of Mount Zion A.M.E. Church property, adapted from Google Maps.

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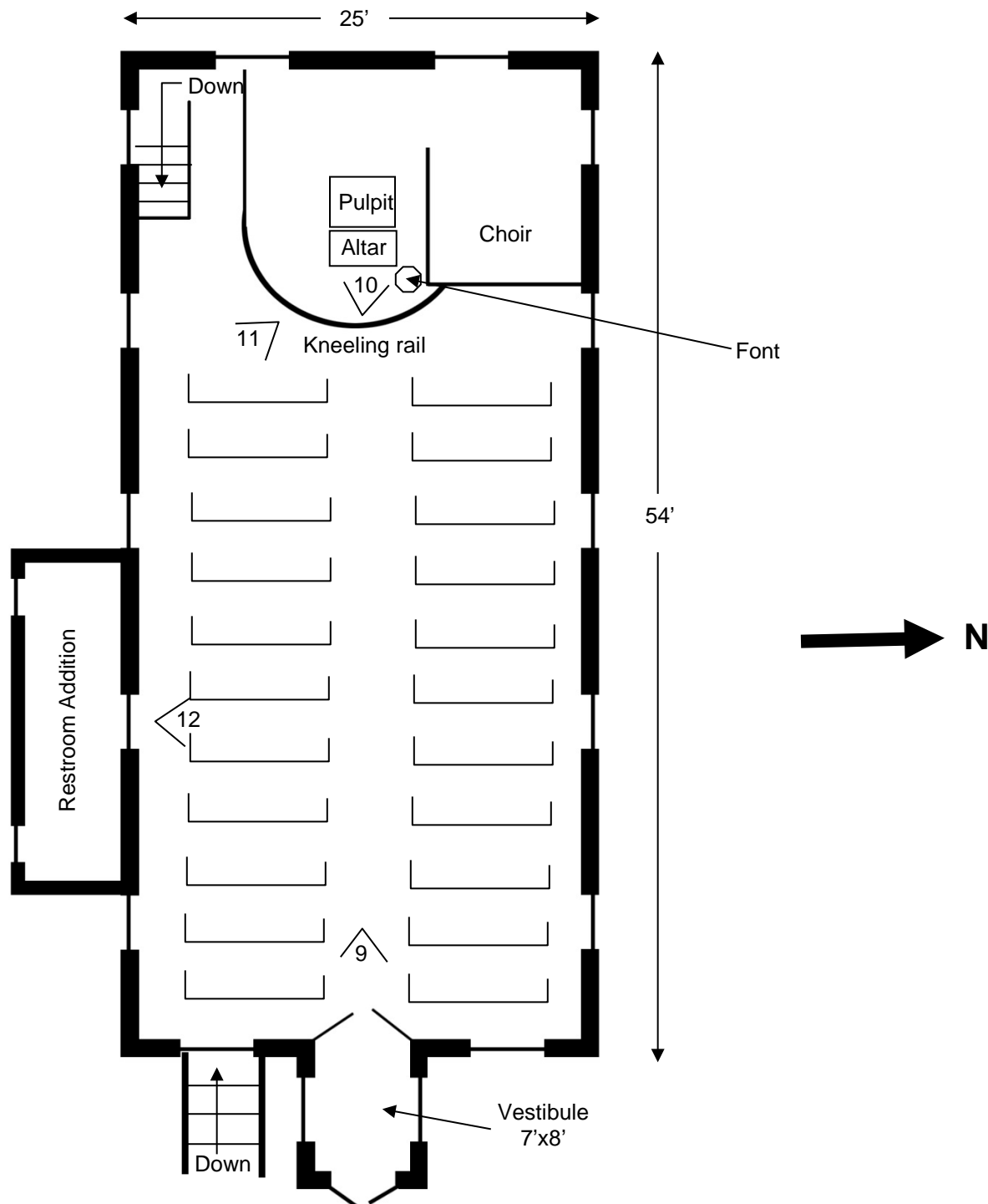
Mount Zion AME Church

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**FLOOR PLAN** (numbers in brackets represent camera angles)

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

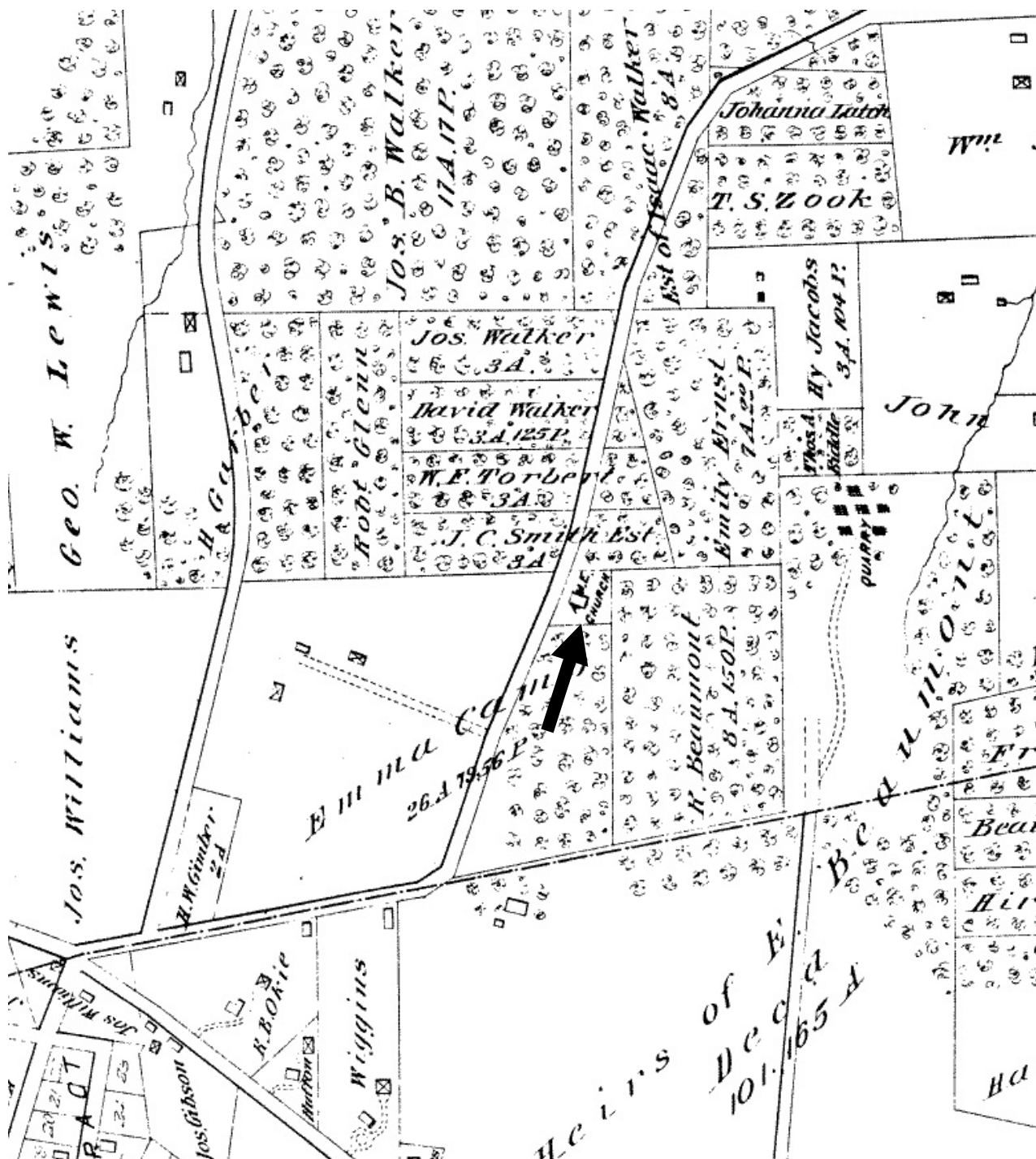
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*Atlas of Properties Along the Pennsylvania R.R.: Overbrook to Malvern* (Philadelphia: J.L. Smith, 1887). The arrow points north to indicate the subject tract.

Name of Property  
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[illegible]

Sections 9-11 page 6

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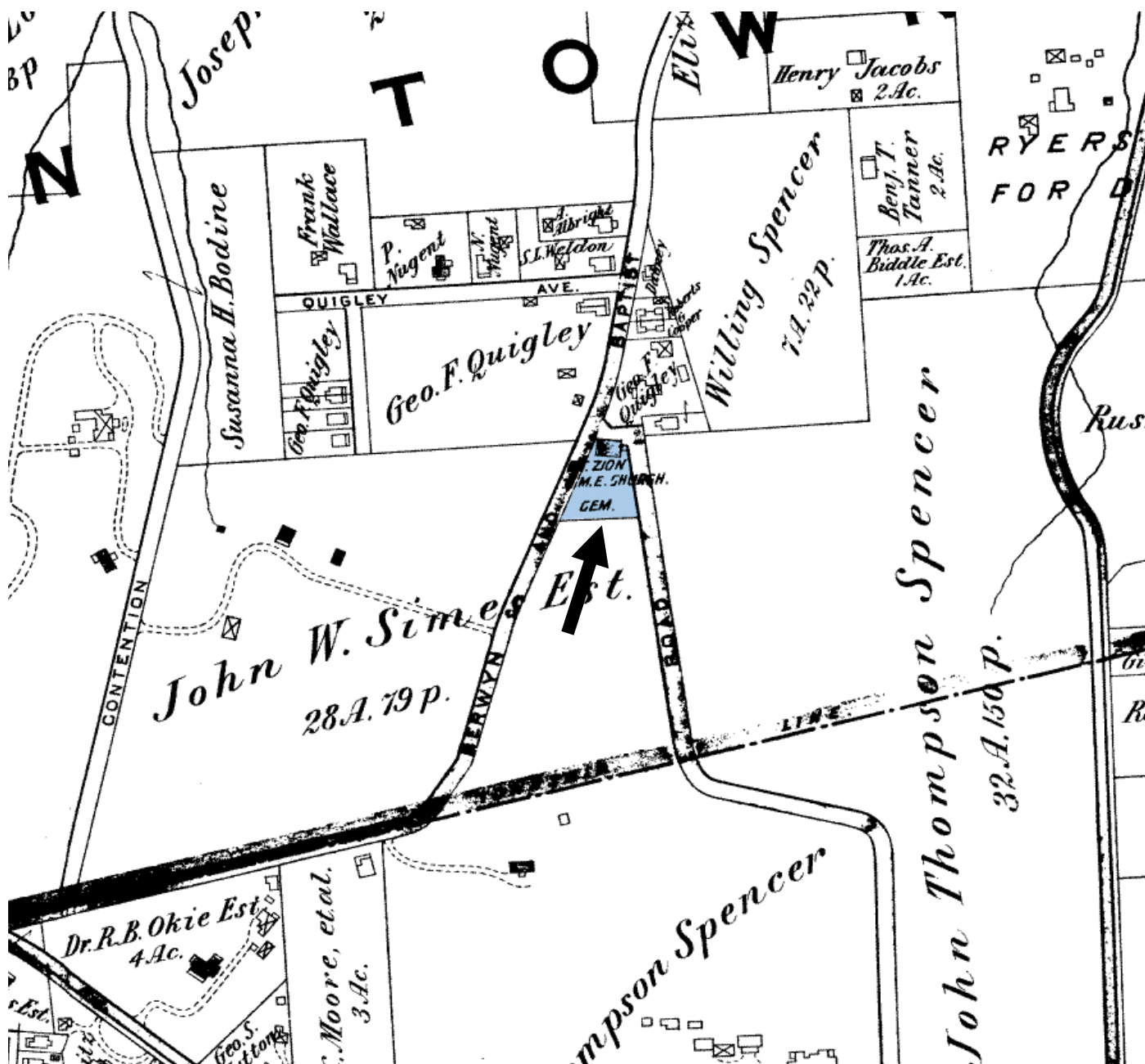
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A.H. Mueller, *Atlas of Properties on Main Line: Pennsylvania Railroad from Devon to Downingtown and West Chester* (Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller, 1912). The arrow points north to indicate the subject tract.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

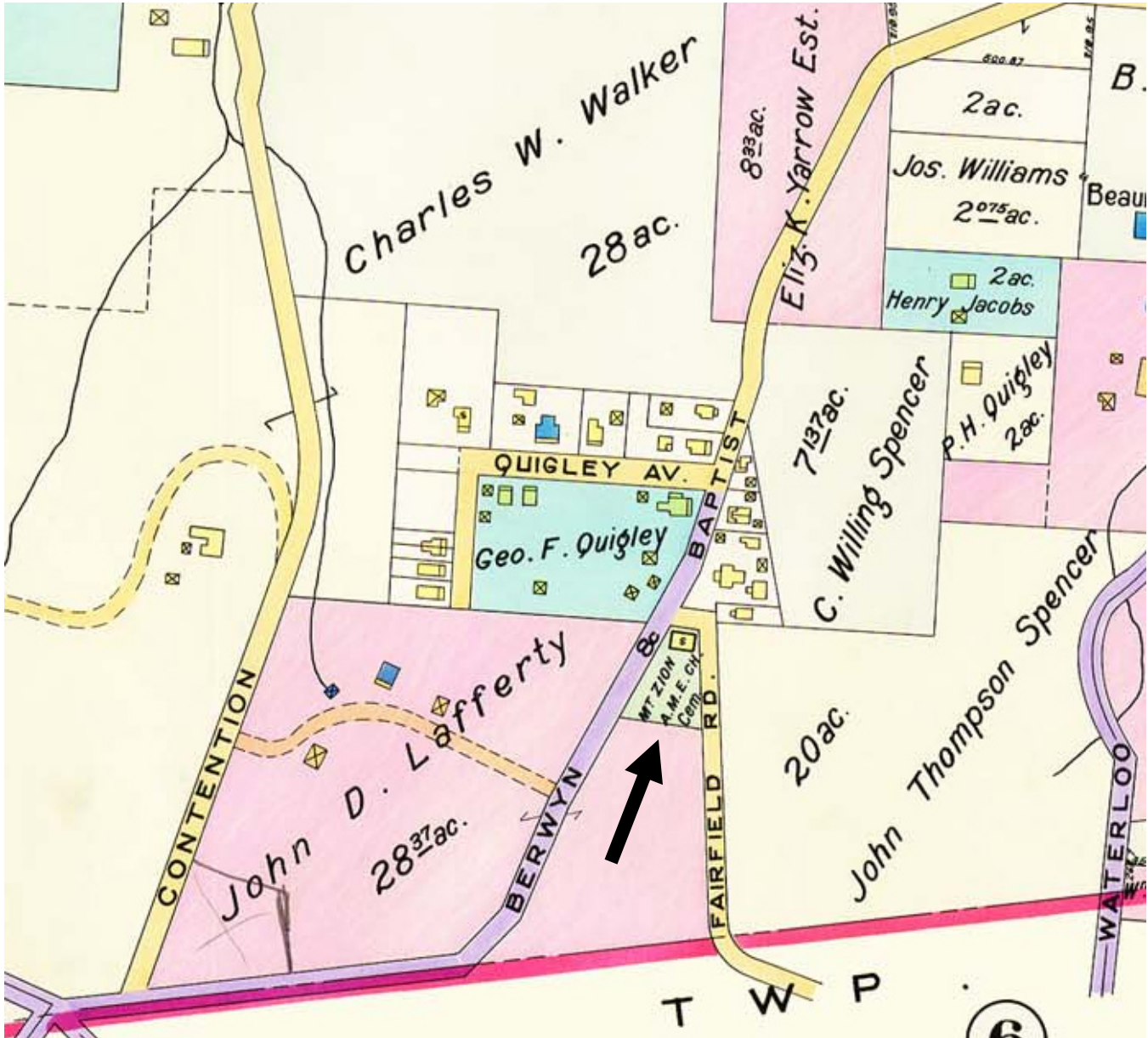
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*Property Atlas of Chester County* (Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company, 1934). The arrow points north to indicate the subject tract.

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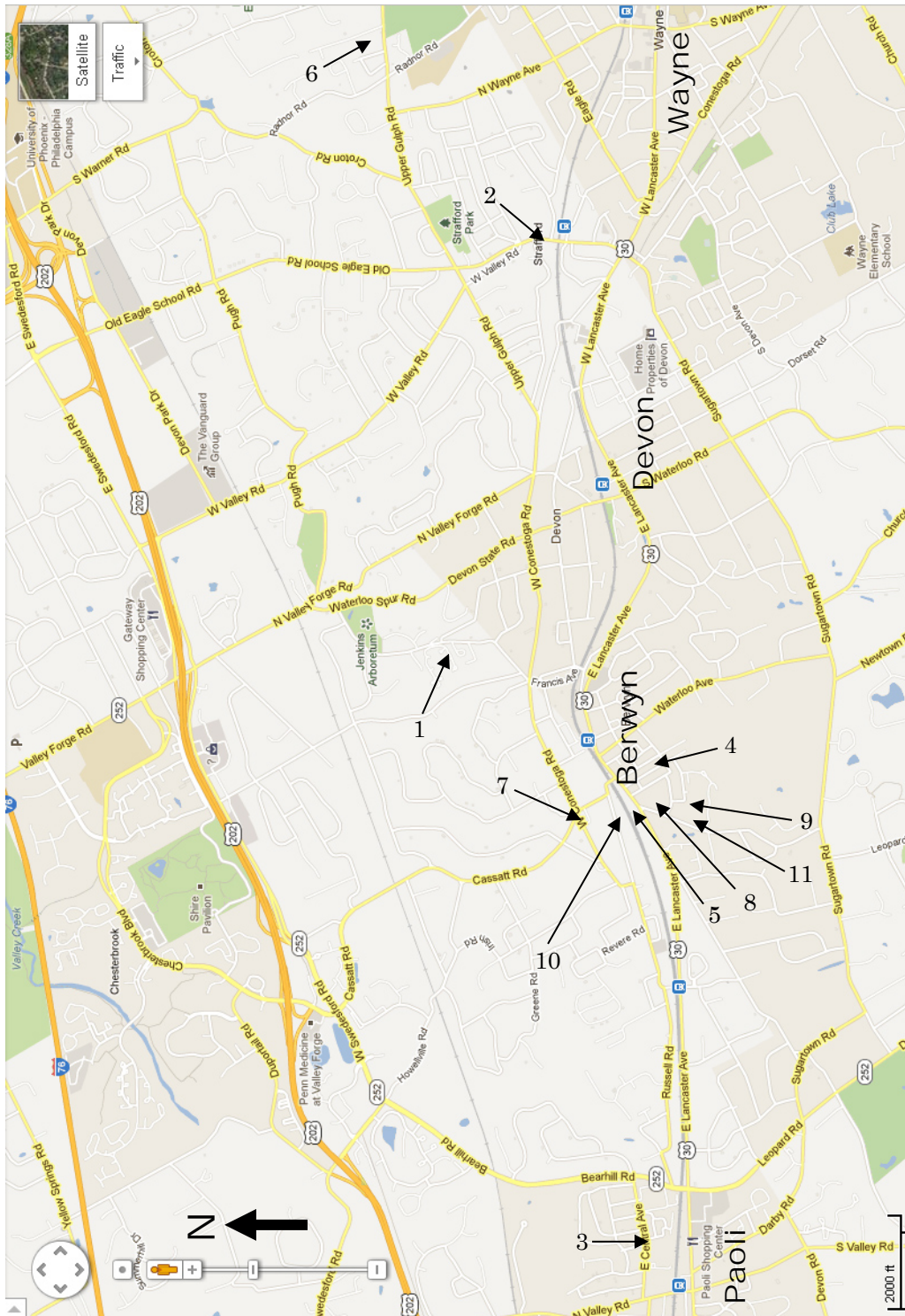
Mount Zion AME Church

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Map showing location of historic resources associated with the school fight, adapted from Google Maps. The following buildings are indicated:

- 1 – Mount Zion A.M.E. Church
- 2 – Strafford Elementary School
- 3 – Paoli Elementary School
- 4 – Easttown Elementary School (demo)
- 5 – Berwyn Primary School
- 6 – Mount Pleasant School and First Baptist Church of Wayne
- 7 – North Berwyn School
- 8 – Mount Zion A.M.E. Parsonage
- 9 – Primus Crosby House
- 10 – APA Hall
- 11 – Elks Lodge

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Historic image of the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building (1939), adapted from the cover image of the *Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church Ninetieth Anniversary* program.



Historic image of the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church building (1984), adapted from the *Official Souvenir Journal of the One Hundred Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration: Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church*. The spire was added in 1973 and removed in 2003.

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Photo of students participating in the School Fight, printed in the *Philadelphia Tribune* on 3/30/1933.



Historic photograph (c.1950) showing a congregational meal in the sanctuary. The current benches had not yet been purchased.

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**National Park Service**

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Section number Maps Page 12

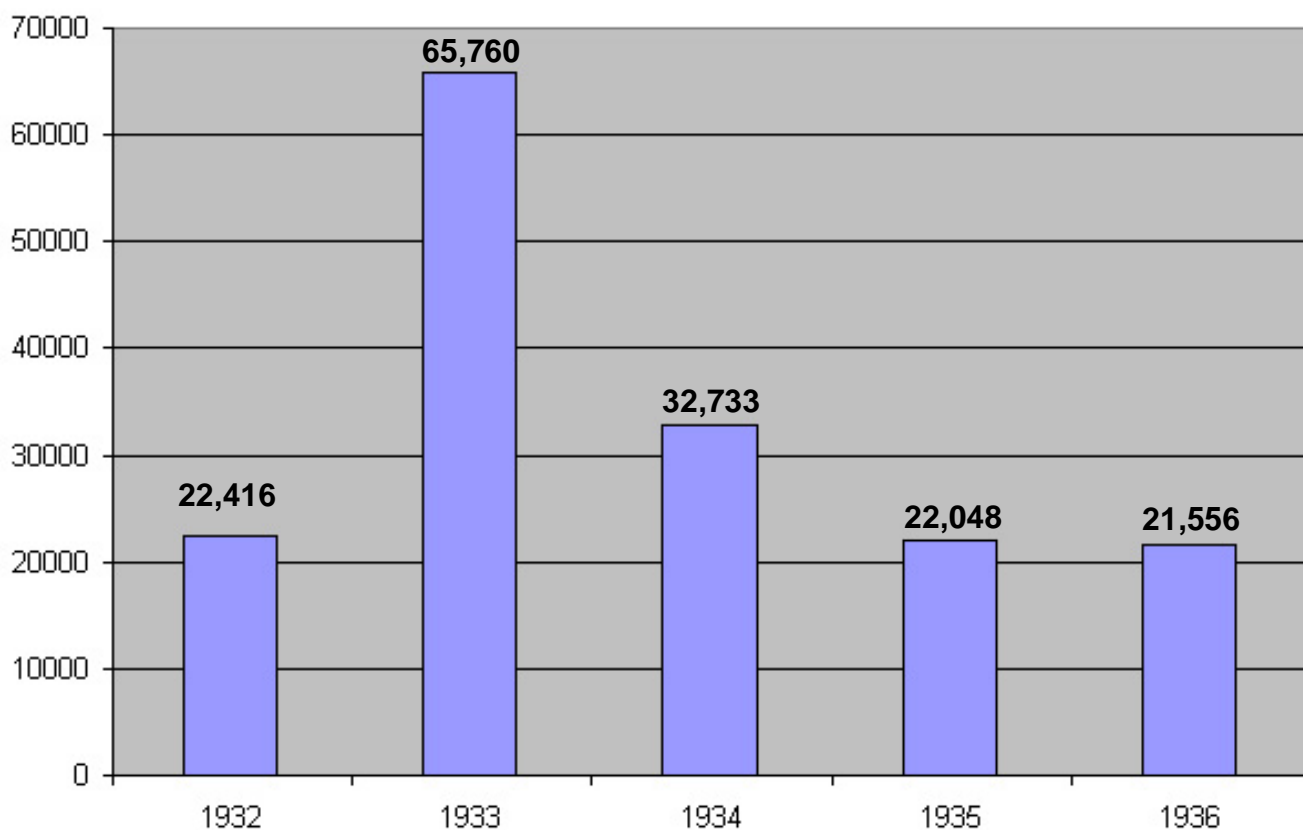


Table of absences from the Tredyffrin-Easttown School District. The X-axis indicates the end of the school year (for example, the first column is for the school year 1931-1932). This information comes from the annual reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Information for years prior to 1932 was not published in the annual reports because at that time the Tredyffrin Easttown School District was a Class 4 district (the annual report summarized Class 4 districts by county). *Statistical Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Harrisburg, PA: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1932-1936).