MEMORANDUM
City of St. Petersburg

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS
THRU: RALPH STONE, PLANNING DIRECTOR
FROM: JAN NOR SOPH, MANAGER, URBAN DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT
DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 1988
SUBJECT: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING —- FEBRUARY 25, 1988

There are two proposed landmark, landmark site, or historic district designations for your consideration at the February 25, 1988 meeting. The applicants in each case have followed all procedures correctly and the public hearing has been advertised in the newspaper.

The first case for your review is HPC #88-01, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. The Bethel A.M.E. Church is the oldest surviving black church in St. Petersburg. It has played an important role in the social, civic, and religious history of the black community, especially that of the neighborhood known as "Methodist Town." Architecturally, Bethel A.M.E. is Gothic Revival in style. Staff is recommending approval of this designation as a landmark/landmark site.

The second application for your consideration is HPC #88-02, the proposed Granada Terrace Historic District. Granada Terrace is a Mediterranean Revival neighborhood that was developed during the 1920's Boom Era by C. Perry Snell. Seventy-eight percent of the property owners in this proposed district signed the petition in support of the district. There are sixty-nine properties in this proposed district; thirty-seven are contributory buildings and thirty-two are non-contributory. Staff is recommending approval of Granada Terrace as a historic district.

Attachments: HPC #88-01 staff report and application
HPC #88-02 staff report and application
Minutes from the January 14, 1988 meeting
HISTORIC DESIGNATION STAFF REPORT
FILE NO: HPC #88-01

1. Name of Property:
   Historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church
   Common Bethel A.M.E., Old Stone Church, Methodist Town Church

2. Applicant: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
   Owner: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
   Owner Support: Yes

3. Location of Property: 912 3rd Avenue North

4. Condition of Property: excellent ___ good X fair ___ poor ___
   ruins ___ unexposed (archaeology) ___
   Has the property been altered? Yes X No ___
   Has the property been moved? Yes ___ No X Date __________
   Note: If altered/moved, described alterations/circumstances of move under "Alterations and Present Appearance."

5. Period Significance: During what period(s) did property achieve historic significance? (cite specific dates where possible)
   Original church founded in November 1894. First and oldest continuing predominantly black church and denomination in St. Petersburg.

6. Area(s) of Significance: In which of the following general categories was the property significant:
   archaeology ___ architecture/engineering X agriculture ___
   arts ___ commerce ___ industry ___ military ___
   politics/government ___ science/invention ___ social/religious X ___
   other ___
7. **Description of Original or Historic Appearance:** Describe the historic appearance of the property and its setting during the period of historic significance, in the following order:

   a. **Original Setting:** describe the surrounding area, neighborhood, rural or urban environment as it existed during the period of historic significance.

      The original building was a wooden structure located on the same property as the current structure, and is part of the John C. Williams, Sr., Subdivision; one of the original subdivisions platted by General John C. Williams, Sr., founder of St. Petersburg (see HPC #86-02 for biographical information on Williams).

      The surrounding area during the 1890's had both urban and residential characteristics. Homes were of the modified 'Cape Code' style of the north and mid-west, featuring the tongue and groove and clapboard style of that period. The residential area was juxtaposed with a thriving commercial district along 9th Street, Burlington, and 3rd Avenues. Hotels, restaurants, entertainment clubs and the like to meet the needs of an ever growing black populace dotted the area. The mainstay of the area, known at that time as 'Methodist Town', was the stone church from which the community took its name. The church was a religious and civic center, where meetings could be held, society gatherings could be sponsored, and the sounds of Sunday day and evening church services could be foretold by the peeling of the 'bell'.

   b. **Exterior appearance of the major contributing resource(s).** Describe the design/style, materials, construction methods.

      By 1905, the church congregation had outgrown the original wooden church building. At this time, a masonry church building was constructed. Popularly known as "stone church", it underwent two facelifts.

      In 1922, construction began on the present brick building which was architecturally based on the Gothic Revival style, as evidenced in the mother church of the denominational connection, Bethel A.M.E. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was literally built right over the existing masonry church. Church records indicate that only one Sunday service had to be suspended due to the construction activities.

      The church building itself is a good example of Gothic Revival architecture. Based on current inventory information less than one percent of the surveyed buildings in St. Petersburg are Gothic Revival. It features a rectangular-shaped floor plan, a parapeted roof, two towers topped with battlements, and numerous pointed arched windows with traceries. The Gothic windows have stained glass in them. The building is two story and contains a basement.

   c. **Interior Appearance:** give overview of interior appearance.

      N.A.
d. Other contributing resources: describe as above.

N.A.

8. Alterations and Present Appearance: Describe alterations to property in chronological order. Indicate the date, type, and reason for each of the following:

a. Alterations to the major resource.

1. 1965 -- Office space added for a part-time secretary and the minister.

2. Central air and heat added.

3. Central audiomicrophone system added.

4. Present plans call for an expansion of the church at its southern end. Plans have already been submitted and permits have been issued. The extension of the back of the church shall accommodate:

   (a) Installation of an elevator for older and disabled members.

   (b) Expansion of existing dining and kitchen facilities. In addition, modernization of the kitchen is planned.

   (c) Addition of a choir room in the second story of the expansion.

   (d) Addition of a finance room, Pastor's Study, and work room in the second story.

   (e) Enlargement of the first floor restrooms and addition of enlarged second floor restrooms.

The timeline for the expansion is Spring, 1988. While the addition will lengthen the overall size of the church, it will not materially alter the basic design and architecture. The brick elevation and integrity of the original design will be maintained.

b. Alterations to other contributing resources.

N.A.

c. Site alterations: demolition of any resources or construction of non-contributing resources, landscape changes, etc.

As previously noted, the church has changed several times since 1894. In 1894, a wooden church was erected. It was moved across the street so that the larger masonry church ("Stone Church") could be built. The "Stone Church" was altered twice before 1922 when the brick church was built over the "Stone Church". The present Bethel A.M.E. church building retains much of its original architectural integrity.
In 1969, the original parsonage (turn of the century wooden building) was razed for a parking lot.

d. Setting alterations: describe changes in the surrounding area or neighborhood:

The general character of the neighborhood surrounding the church has altered dramatically since the founding of the church. The clapboard homes, apartments, and businesses have been gradually replaced by commercial and service businesses. Ninth Street, largely black owned at the beginning of the century, is now a main commercial corridor. Most recently, a large city-owned public housing community, "Jamestown", has been built, along with two high rise senior citizen apartments, "John Knox and Burlington Towers", as well as single story living facilities for the elderly. Black residents have gradually migrated south, and to a lesser degree north from "Methodist Town. However, membership in the church remains strong, with second and third generation descendants of the original founders still worshipping at Bethel.

9. Statement of Significance: Describe the historic significance of the property:

a. What events and circumstances led to the original development of the property? Why was it developed at that particular time and place?

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first black organized religious denomination in America (St. Petersburg Times, Section E, March 14, 1987, p.1). It traces its history back to Philadelphia in November, 1787, where Richard Allen, a licensed Methodist lay preacher, protested his church's segregation of black members. That day, he and three followers prayed and meditated with white members at the alter which was against church policy. Upon rising, after being asked to leave the alter, Allen and the rest of the black members of the congregation, walked out of the church altogether. They quickly founded their own Methodist Episcopal Church. It took them time and energy, but "they literally turned a blacksmith shop into a cathedral (Ibid, P.6). Within seven years of the walkout, the congregation had built its first sanctuary on the site of the blacksmith shop. The church also became the base for a new organization, the Free African Society, which brought together freed slaves who were trying to help free others.

Bethel broke from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 1800's and, along with several other groups who were disenchanted with the growing segregationist attitudes of white congregation members, formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Ibid, p. 6). Today the African Methodist Episcopal denomination has more than 6,000 congregations; 18 episcopal (bishop-led) districts in the United States, Africa, Caribbean, and South America; and, approximately 3.5 million members worldwide (Ibid, p.1).

When St. Petersburg was forming as a community in the late 19th Century, there were of course a number of black people moving to the area. By 1894, Reverend J.S. Braswell had established an African
Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) congregation. In 1894, this A.M.E. congregation built its first sanctuary, a small wooden church building, where the present Bethel A.M.E. now stands. From this early beginning, Bethel A.M.E. grew into a church that played a key social, civic, and religious role in the "life of St. Petersburg's black community" in Methodist Town (Ibid, p.7).

b. Who was involved in the original development? Who was the owner? architect? builder? What other significant work or activities where these persons noted for? Are other important persons associated with the property? How?

and

c. Describe the above persons, including such details as: educational and professional background, important events surrounding their lives, builder/architect's role in development of St. Petersburg, other buildings built or designed, etc.

It is important to note that members of Bethel A.M.E. Church helped to build the Church through their labor. For example, a number of members contributed by buying bricks (two or three at a time) to help defray the cost of the church.

Bethel A.M.E. was located in the midst of a thriving business area and many activities were given at Bethel for the purpose of uplifting the spirits of its members and people in the surrounding community. Many of the founders were local businessman or laborers. The community surrounding the church was named "Methodist Town", in honor of the church.

The original founders who contributed to the spirit and foundation of Bethel A.M.E. church were:

Charles R. Hargrave - A property owner and landlord in St. Petersburg. A friend to many black and white citizens, it was Mr. Hargrave who stood for the lumber needed to construct the church. He was a trustee and class leader.

Ancell J. McLaughlin - An early insurance agent and a janitor at Wilson Chase, a landmark department store in St. Petersburg, Mr. McLaughlin was a class leader and trustee. Mr. McLaughlin's wife, Mary was noteworthy her own right as a teacher and caretaker for needy children in her home.

Loomis Williams - A land developer and restauranteur, Mr. Williams ran a fast food restaurant on 10th Street and 2nd Avenue North. An owner of considerable property, he provided the loan to the church to begin its initial renovation. Mr. Williams served as President of Usher Board #1, President of the Jolly Worker's Club, and as president of the Trustee Board.

Mr. Jake W. Hughes - A hotel owner and land owner, he was the proprietor of the Hughes Hotel on the corner of Lee Street (now Jackson Street) and Hanson Avenue (now Burlington Avenue).
Mr. Andrew Wildeman - A landscaper and resident of old "Pepper Town", a name attached to an area bordered by 8th Street on the East, 9th Street on the West, and 4th and 5th Avenues South on the north and south respectively. A generous trustee, he stood for some of the material and tools needed to build by church.

Mr. Nathaniel Williams - a mortician and funeral home director by profession, Mr. 'Nat' Williams conducted business initially in "Methodist Town." He subsequently moved to 7th Avenue and 20th Street South, joined in partnership later by Mr. Robert Creal. The business still thrives presently as Creal Funeral Home.

Mr. Robert B. Blue - Mr. Blue was a grocery store proprietor. He owned and ran Blue Grocery Store at 311 11th Street North. Mr. Blue served as a trustee and a choir member.

Mr. Albert R. Debose - A developer and property manager, Mr. Debose was a member of the Trustee Board. He led the effort to build the present structure and through his contact with influential members of the white community, secured financial assistance to build the present church.

**Pastoral Lineage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TERM OF SERVICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rev. J.S. Braswell</td>
<td>1894-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. S.J. Johnson</td>
<td>1901-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. J.H. Dorsett</td>
<td>1905-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. G.W. Jenkins</td>
<td>1909-1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. R.B. Brookins</td>
<td>1914-1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. R.D. McLin</td>
<td>1917-1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. S.A. Williams</td>
<td>1922-1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. H.B. Barkley</td>
<td>1926-1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. J.J. Heath</td>
<td>1928-1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. R.J. Jones</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. A.A. Williams</td>
<td>1940-1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. W.A. Jennings</td>
<td>1942-1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. R.H. Jackson</td>
<td>1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. J.A. Robinson</td>
<td>1945-1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. A.P. Postell</td>
<td>1947-1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. F.E. Snead</td>
<td>1949-1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. H. McDonald Nelson</td>
<td>1957-1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. H. McNeal Harris</td>
<td>1965-1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. John Mainer</td>
<td>1985-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Waymon Dixon</td>
<td>1986-Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. How was the property used during its period of significance? What important events or developments occurred there? How do they fit into the overall historic development of the community?
e. How and by whom was the property used after its period of significance?

The Bethel A.M.E. Church has always been used as a church, a meeting place, and a civic hall. The black neighborhood of Methodist Town (now Jamestown) grew up around the church, which served as a focal point for the community's religious, social, civic, and even political activities.

Today, the Church continues to be active in areas outside of religion. Last year, Bethel A.M.E. received a grant of $54,000 from the McKnight Foundation and the Florida Board of Regents to establish on its premises a new "Pinellas County Center of Excellence." The facility will be designed to help young blacks and students of other ethnic minorities achieve their highest potential. The focus of the center is on building self-esteem among minority students through a variety of incentives (St. Petersburg Times, Section E, March 14, 1987, p.7).

10. Identify existing use(s) of the site and any adverse impacts:

Bethel A.M.E. Church was and continues to be used as a church, a meeting hall, and a civic hall. There are no known adverse impacts.

11. Discuss the relationship of the landmark to any existing and future City development plans:

N.A.

12. Evaluation of Significance:

Bethel A.M.E. Church is a Gothic Revival style church located in the Jamestown section of the Intown sector. Bethel A.M.E. is the first and oldest continuing predominantly black church and denomination in St. Petersburg. The church has served as a religious, social, and civic center for the black community since 1894.

The Bethel A.M.E. Church meets the following criteria listed for designation of property as a landmark, landmark site, or historic district:

(1) Its value is a significant reminder of the cultural or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation;

(3) It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the City, state, or nation;

(5) Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance; and,

(6) It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.
13. **Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends APPROVAL of the Bethel A.M.E. Church as a local landmark and landmark site.

Sources:
1. Bethel A.M.E. Church Historic Designation Application
3. Bethel A.M.E. Church Eighty-Eight Anniversary Publication
4. Bethel A.M.E. Florida Master Site File Form
APPLICATION TO THE ST. PETERSBURG HISTORIC PRESERVATION
COMMISSION FOR LOCAL DESIGNATION OF LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES
CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG PLANNING DEPARTMENT

1. NAME OF SITE OR PROPERTY PROPOSED FOR DESIGNATION:

HISTORIC NAME: the name by which the property was known originally or
during the period of its historic significance (often the name of the
person who originally developed the property):

BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL (A.M.E.) CHURCH

OTHER NAMES: Common names by which it has been or is currently known.

BETHEL AME, OLD STONE CHURCH, METHODIST TOWN CHURCH

2. LOCATION: Street and number:

912 3rd Avenue North, St. Petersburg, Florida 33712

3. CLASSIFICATION: Type of property being designated:

building ____ structure X object ____ site X

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY: Name and address. Bethel A.M.E. Church, Inc.

912 3rd Avenue North

St. Petersburg, Fl. 33705

Telephone Number:

(813) 822-2089

5. USE OF PROPERTY: historic use:

CHURCH, MEETING HALL, CIVIC HALL

present use:

CHURCH, MEETING HALL, CIVIC HALL

Is the property presently occupied? Yes X No ____

6. ACCESSIBILITY: Is the exterior visible from public rights-of-way?

Yes X No ____

Is the interior accessible to public visitation? Regularly X

By owner permission X Not accessible ____

7. CONDITION OF PROPERTY: excellent ____ good X fair ____ poor ___

ruins ____ unexposed (archaeology) ___

Has the property been altered? Yes X No ____

Has the property been moved? Yes ____ No X Date __________________
8. **PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** During what period(s) did property achieve historic significance. (cite specific dates where possible) **November, 1894,**

Original church founded. First and oldest continuing predominantly black church and denomination in St. Petersburg.

9. **AREA(S) OF SIGNIFICANCE:** In which of the following general categories was the property significant:

- archaeology _____
- architecture/engineering **X**
- agriculture _____
- arts _____
- commerce _____
- industry _____
- military _____
- politics/government **X**
- science/inventions _____
- social/religious **X**
- other _____

10. **BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:** Describe boundary line encompassing all man-made and natural resources to be included in designation (legal description or survey as recorded on property rolls in county courthouse)

   **Township 31, Range 16, Section 21**

   Local description (as recorded on property rolls in County Courthouse):

   Williams, John C. Sr. Subdivision, Block 7, Lots 1, 2, &3, as recorded for record in the public records of Pinellas County, Plat Book OHL, pp. 041-045. This site was among the first properties platting in the original layout of St. Petersburg by its founder, Mr. John C. Williams, Sr.

11. **RESOURCE TYPES:** List all man-made features encompassed by the boundaries by number and type, including prehistoric features where known: aboriginal mounds or middens, building, outbuildings, landscaping, etc. Indicate with an asterisk (*) those that contribute to the historic character of the property.

   Most important is the church building. Its structure and style are reminiscent of some of the earliest buildings in St. Petersburg. In addition, the ceiling and stained glass are a gothic revival type.
12. **DESCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL OR HISTORIC APPEARANCE:** Describe the historic appearance of the property and its setting during the period of historic significance, in the following order:

   a. **Original Setting:** describe the surrounding area, neighborhood, rural or urban environment as it existed during the period of historic significance.

   b. **Exterior appearance of the major contributing resource(s).** Describe the design/style, materials, construction methods. Start with the "front" and work around the resource.

   c. **Interior Appearance:** give overview of interior appearance.

   d. **Other contributing resources:** describe as above.

**Write Historic Description Below (Use a continuation sheet if necessary):**

Bethel A.M.E. Church, the oldest black church in St. Petersburg, was established by the Rev. J.S. Braswell in November, 1894. The original building was a wooden structure and was located in one of the original subdivisions platted by Mr. John C. Williams, Sr., founder of the "Sunshine City".

General Williams, a former mayor of Detroit, Michigan, discovered the community in 1875, while in search of a spot to regain his health. He plotted over 100 streets for St. Petersburg, and it is for him that 'Williams Park' is named.

The surrounding area during the 1890's had both urban and residential characteristics. Homes were of the modified 'Cape Cod' style of the north and mid-west, featuring the tongue and groove and clap board style found in the 'Hay' historical home and others of that period. The residential area was juxtaposed with a thriving commercial district along 9th Street, Burlington, and 3rd Avenues. Hotels, restaurants, entertainment clubs and the like to meet the needs of an ever growing black populace dotted the area. The mainstay of the area, known at that time as 'Methodist Town', was the stone church from which the community took its name. The church was a religious and civic center, where meetings could be held, society gatherings could be sponsored, and the sounds of Sunday day and evening church services could be foretold by the peeling of the 'bell'. 
13. **ALTERATIONS AND PRESENT APPEARANCE**: Describe alterations to property in chronological order. Indicate the date, type, and reason for each of the following:

a. Alterations to the major resource.
b. Alterations to other contributing resources.
c. Site alterations: demolition of any resources or construction of non-contributing resources, landscape changes, etc.
d. Setting alterations: describe changes in the surrounding area or neighborhood:

Write Description of Alterations Below (Use a continuation sheet if necessary).

By 1905, the church congregation had outgrown the "Wooden Church" and a masonry building was started by Rev. S. J. Johnson and carried on to completion by Rev. J.H. Dorsett. The finishing of this structure brought about the popular name, "Stone Church", and the naming of the section of the city surrounding it as "Methodist Town". The church underwent two facelifts in stone.

In 1922, a group lead by Rev. S.A. Williams began the construction of the present tan brick edifice. Stewards and Trustees in that group included: C.R. Hargrave, A.J. McLaughlin, Robert B. Blue, Richard Green, A.R. Debose, Robert Williams, Nathaniel J. Williams, Loomis Williams, and W.J. Hughes. The new structure was based on the Gothic Revival style as evidenced in the mother church of the denominational connection, Bethel A.M.E. in Philadelphia, Pa. It featured the basement and upper room design, quite uncommon to the south. The architecture and style were exemplary, featuring a cantilevered ceiling and #96 type stain glass windows. In 1969, the original parsonage next to the church was razed, making way for a parking facilities for the congregation. Office space for a part-time secretary, along with office space for the minister was added in 1965. Central heating and air and a central audiomicrophone system were later improvements.

The general character of the neighborhood surrounding the church has altered dramatically since the founding of the church. The clapboard homes, apartments, and businesses have been gradually replaced by commercial and service businesses. Ninth Street, largely black owned at the beginning of the century is now a main commercial corridor. Most recently, a large city-owned public housing community, "Jamestown", has been built, along with two high rise senior citizen apartments, "John Knox and Burlington Towers", as well as single story living facilities for the elderly. Black residents have gradually migrated south, and to a lesser degree north from "Methodist Town. However, membership in the church remains loyal and strong, with second and third generation descendants of the original founders still worshipping at Bethel.
ALTERATIONS

Present plans call for an expansion of the church at its southern end. The extension of the back of the church shall accommodate:

1. Installation of an elevator for older and disabled members.
2. Expansion of existing dining and kitchen facilities. In addition, modernization of the kitchen is planned.
3. Addition of a choir room in the second story of the expansion.
4. Addition of a finance room, Pastor's Study, and work room in the second story.
5. Enlargement of the first floor rest rooms and addition of enlarged second floor rest rooms.

The time line for the expansion is fall, 1987. While the addition will lengthen the overall size of the church, it will not materially alter the basic design and architecture. The brick elevation and integrity of the original designers will be maintained. The church has great symbolic as well as physically beauty and the goal of our membership is to maintain our church.
14. **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Describe the historic significance of the property:

a. What events and circumstances led to the original development of the property? Why was it developed at that particular time and place?

b. Who was involved in the original development? Who was the owner? architect? builder? What other significant work or activities where these persons noted for? Are other important persons associated with the property? How?

c. Be sure to give basic biographical information, if possible, on the above persons, including such details as: date and place of birth, and death, educational and professional background, and important events surrounding their lives.

d. How was the property used during its period of significance? What important events or developments occurred there? How do they fit into the overall historic development of the community?

e. How and by whom was the property used after its period of significance?

Write Significance Statement below (use a continuation sheet if necessary).

Please see attached **Statement of Significance** and **Summary**
15. **ATTACH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:**

a. A locator map showing the location of the property.

b. A site plan justifying the boundaries of the property to be designated and the location of all contributing and non-contributing resources on the site.

c. Photographs: black & white 5" x 7" or 8" x 10", two copies of each shot, showing:

   1) An overall view of the property (taken at a distance to show all or as many of the resources as possible).

   2) Close-up shots of significant or unusual decorative or structural details of the property.

   3) One exterior view of any other major feature or structure within the boundaries of the property to be designated.

d. Footnotes and a bibliography of sources used in the preparation of the description and significance statements.

16. **DESIGNATION PROPOSAL PREPARED BY** (include title and name of agency or organization if appropriate):

   **Name** Mrs. Annie M. Reddick  
   **Title** Chairperson—Archives Committee  
   **Agency** Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
   **Address** 912 3rd Avenue North  
   **St. Petersburg, Florida 33705**  
   **Telephone Number** (813) 822-2089  
   **Date proposal prepared** December 1, 1987  
   **Signature of preparer** Annie M. Reddick  

   **Historical Committee Members:**
   - Willie B. Felton, Jr.  
   - Charles Minnis  
   - Versey Okumu  
   - Katie L. Postell  
   - Rev. Waymon T. Dixon  
   - Pastor
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
Bethel A.M.E. Church

Summary and Biography

Records do not permit our committee to retrace the complete historical significance of what happen to our black founders at Bethel A.M.E. Church. Although extensive research was done at Pinellas County and St. Petersburg records departments, it was found that most records, photographs, documents and official information were passed on by church members through bibles, historical programs and oral presentations by church members.

Extensive research by our committee was conducted by
1. Talking with contemporaries and relatives of descendants of Bethel A.M.E.
2. Talking with various community leaders
3. researching written documents
4. Examining photographs
5. Looking at past historical programs presented by Bethel A.M.E. members

It is important to note that members of Bethel A.M.E. Church help build the Church through their labor. For example a number of members contributed by buying bricks (two or three at a time) to help defray the cost of the church.

Bethel A.M.E. was located in the midst of a thriving business area and many activities were given at Bethel uplifting the spirits of its members and people in the surrounding community. Many of the founders were local businessman or laborers. The community surrounding the church was named "Methodist Town", in honor of the church.

The original founders who contributed to the spirit and foundation of Bethel A.M.E. church were:

Charles R. Hargrave
A property owner and landlord, in St. Petersburg. A friend to many black and white citizens, it was Mr. Hargrave who stood for the lumber needed to construct the church. He was a trustee and class leader.

Ancell J. McLaughlin
An early insurance agent and a janitor at Wilson Chase, a landmark department store in St. Petersburg, Mr. McLaughlin was a class leader and trustee. Mr. McLaughlin's wife, Mary was noteworthy her own right as a teacher and caretaker for needy children in her home.

Loomis Williams
A land developer and restauranteur, Mr. Williams ran a fast food restaurant on 10th street and 2nd Avenue North. An owner of considerable property, he provided the loan to the church to begin its initial renovation. Mr. Williams served as President of Usher Board #1, President of the Jolly Worker's Club, and as president of the Trustee Board.
Mr. Jake W. Hughes
A hotel owner and land owner, he was the proprietor of the Hughes Hotel on the corner of Lee Street (now Jackson Street) and Hanson Avenue (Now Burlington Avenue). The Smith Hotel was the first and oldest black hotel in the St. Petersburg.

Mr. Andrew Wildeman
A landscaper and resident of old "Pepper Town", a name attached to an area bordered by 8th street on the East, 9th street on the West, and 4th and 5th Avenues South or the north and south respectively, Mr. Wodeman was a by profession. A generous trustee, he stood for some of the material and tools needed to build by church.

Mr. Nathaniel Williams
A mortician and funeral home director by profession, Mr.'Nat' Williams conducted business initially in "Methodist Town." He subsequently moved to 7th Avenue and 20th Street South, joined in partnership later by Mr. Robert Creal. The business still thrives presently as Creal Funeral Home.

Mr. Robert B. Blue
Mr. Blue was a grocery store proprietor. He owned and ran Blue and Grocery Store at 311 11th Street North. Mr. Blue served as a trustee and a choir member.

Mr. Albert R. Debose
A developer and property manager, Mr. Debose was an able and capable member of the Trustee Board. He led the effort to build the present structure and through his contact with influential members of the White community, secured financial assistance to build the present church.

Specific references concerning the historical impact of Bethel A.M.E. Church and its founders can be drawn from the following:


2. Bethel A.M.E. Church's 88th Anniversary yearbook provide pictures and historical information about founders and members of the church.

3. Architectural History of St. Petersburg provides the physical design; formation and composition of Bethel A.M.E.
ORDINANCE NO. 88-______

AN ORDINANCE DESIGNATING THE BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL (A.M.E.) CHURCH LOCATED AT 912 THIRD AVENUE NORTH AS A LOCAL LANDMARK/LANDMARK SITE; ADDING IT TO THE LOCAL REGISTER CREATED PURSUANT TO CITY CODE CHAPTER 35 1/2; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

THE CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG DOES ORDAIN:

SECTION 1. Pursuant to St. Petersburg City Code Chapter 35 1/2, the following property is designated as a landmark/landmark site:

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church located at 912 Third Avenue North (John C. Williams, Sr. Subdivision, Block 7, Lots 1, 2, and 3)

SECTION 2. A local register listing has been created of designated landmarks, landmark sites, and historic districts. The above described property is hereby added to this local register as a landmark/landmark site.

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall become effective immediately upon its adoption.

Passed by City Council on first reading on:
Passed by City Council on second and final reading on:

MAYOR-COUNCILMEMBER
CHAIRPERSON OF THE CITY COUNCIL

ATTEST: Clerk of the City Council

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND SUBSTANCE:

City Attorney or Assistant Date

BETHELORD/JILL
Pictured above (L to R) - Mr. A.J. McLaughlin, founding Trustee, Rev. F.E. Sneed, Pastor at Bethel A.M.E. from 1949 to 1956, and Mr. Loomis Williams, founding Trustee.