

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: El Bethel Methodist Church

Other names/site number: El Bethel Church; DHR# 005-5259

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 925 Buffalo Springs Turnpike

City or town: Amherst State: VA County: Amherst

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: X

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X 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 X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B X C D

<hr/>	<hr/>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<hr/>	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
<hr/>	
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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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

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</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>0</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

FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: meeting hall

FUNERARY: cemetery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Late Gothic Revival

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD, CONCRETE, METAL

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.)

Summary Paragraph

El Bethel Church, historically known as El Bethel Methodist Church, is located among the rolling hills of central Amherst County. It is one of just two remaining public buildings of Allwood, a rural community located along the Buffalo Springs Turnpike (State Route 635). The building stands on a natural rise in an open yard and appears to be on a temple mount. At the base of the rise is a stone retaining wall flanking a concrete stair with concrete walkway leading to the stepped portico entry of the church. Shrubs and perennial plantings camouflage the wall and emphasize the stair. The present building, built circa 1930, is the second church, of the same name, to be built on the site. The first was constructed around 1857 and was razed in 1930 to build a smaller space with materials recycled from the earlier church. The circa 1930 frame building is an eclectic mix of Classical Revival and Late Gothic Revival styles. The temple-form edifice has a poured concrete foundation, weatherboard siding, and a standing-seam metal gable roof. Notable exterior features are the portico and the lancet window and door bays. Interior features including a barrel-vaulted ceiling and stained-glass windows. The Allwood Cemetery, behind the church, is historically associated with the church and contains many interments of former members. It is still an active cemetery and contains over 300 burials. The headstones are generally etched, upright or lawn-level, granite markers. This is the largest burial ground in this section of the county. Overall the property retains high integrity of location, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association; integrity of design is largely intact as well, but for a 1960s redesign of the pulpit area.

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Narrative Description

Site and Setting Description

El Bethel Church is located on the eastern side of Buffalo Springs Turnpike (State Route 635). It is in the heart of a community in central Amherst County known as Allwood. This is a rural farming community characterized by its rolling hills. The building sits on a natural rise in an open yard. The site is landscaped to make it appear as a temple mount. At the base is an uncoursed stone retaining wall flanking a concrete stair with a concrete walkway and additional steps rising to the stepped portico entry of the building. Shrubs and perennial plantings hide the retaining wall on either side of the stair. The cemetery, behind the church, is open and enclosed with an uncoursed stone wall on the west, at the entry and the remainder by a triple-rail wooden fence. The cemetery follows the natural rise of the land.

Detailed Building Description

Exterior Description

El Bethel Church was constructed in 1930, to replace an earlier 1857 church building. The new construction included the use of materials recycled from the earlier building, likely the framing and siding materials.¹ The present El Bethel Church is a frame, gable-front edifice with a poured concrete foundation, weatherboard siding, and a standing-seam metal gable roof. The 44-by-28-foot main block is a Classical Revival temple form with a three-bay inset portico measuring six feet deep by 28 feet wide, under an extension of the main roof, supported by four fluted Doric columns. Within the front gable field is a lunette-shaped louvered vent. Each of the building's elevations has three symmetrically spaced Gothic Revival, lancet-arched bays. The windows and transoms are stained-glass and the windows have hopper-style sash. The exterior of the building remains unaltered since its construction. The principal entry, centered within the portico, is flanked by two windows. The double-leaf doors of the entry each have two flat panels identifiable to the early twentieth century.

The north and south side elevations are identical, with three tall, narrow lancet windows. The eaves of both elevations have exposed rafter tails. The rear (east) elevation has three windows; the center window is larger than those that flank it. In the gable field there is a rectangular, louvered vent. Near the northwest corner of the rear elevation is a concrete-block chimney flue and a concrete-block bulkhead with double doors. The bulkhead leads to an underground storage space.

Interior Description

The interior has a center-aisle arrangement and the nave is separated from the chancel by a partition with three lancet arches. There are nine rows of twelve-foot pews with stylized lancets

¹ Amherst County Heritage Book 1761-1999, Vol I, p. 50-5; "El Bethel Church" file from the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society.

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on the ends to either side of the aisle. The original medium-gauge wooden flooring is exposed beneath the pews; all other floor areas are carpeted. The barrel-vaulted ceiling appears to be unique among extant Amherst County churches. An original 1930s pendant lights hang from the ceiling.

The pulpit is in front of the arched partition and the center aisle continues to the chancel through the pulpit area. The pulpit area rises from the main floor and is marked by rails with square balusters on either side of the aisle. The aisle step, in the pulpit to the chancel, is flanked by solid paneled rails. This area was reconfigured in the 1960s by member Hal Myers, Jr. (1925-2004). The extent of the redesign and reasoning for it remains unknown. The church's historical records are lost.² The chancel, behind the arched partition, is one level and contains the altar table, choir pews, and piano.

The collection of eleven stained-glass hopper-style windows and the stained-glass transom are significant interior features. The windows are unsigned. All windows feature a different image in the center of the window, and all but one are Christian symbols. There are three window patterns. The six side windows have crosses at the arch peak, a background of yellow with red diamonds, an oval center image, and the memorials at the bottom are contained within stylized Latin crosses. The three chancel windows have stylized flowers in the arch peaks, solid backgrounds, central images in a four-sided figure with rounded corners, draped, stylized flowers below the central image, and memorials within a scroll design. The two windows and transoms of the west wall have crosses within an oval at the arch peak and the memorials are within a framed area. The windows each have a background with a white elongated shape with blue between the shapes; the center images are contained within ovals. The northern window of the west wall features an image generally referred to as the Confederate flag.³ This window is a memorial to Confederate veteran, John H. Parr and his wife, Betty. John Parr died in 1899 and was the first to be buried in the Allwood Cemetery.⁴

Cemetery Description

The Allwood Community Cemetery is located behind the church. It is enclosed by an uncoursed stone wall on the west and by a wooden triple-rail fence on the remaining three sides. The overall plan of the cemetery is rectilinear, with grassy paths defining square or rectangular clusters of burials. The cemetery remains open for new interments, and currently contains over

² Amherst County Heritage Book 1761-1999, Vol I, p. 50-51. Church Records are not filed with Mount Pleasant or with the larger Methodist organizational library; they have been lost as some point.

³ This is the rectangular flag used late in the Civil War by the Confederate Navy. The square form was the Battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia. The design, by William Porcher Miles (1822-1899), was submitted to the government, but was rejected.

⁴ John H. Parr (1836-1899) was a Confederate veteran. He was a clerk with the rank of Adjutant for the 7th Regiment, Virginia Infantry and was wounded at Gettysburg. He operated the Allwood store and served as a Supervisor for Amherst County. He was mortally wounded in a shootout/duel at the Amherst County Courthouse. He got into a dispute with the sheriff and it escalated to violence with both men, in the open, shooting at each other. Seven shots were fired. The sheriff was grazed and Parr was struck in the lungs. He returned home and died soon thereafter. (Information from Ancestry.com, Amherst County Museum and Historical Society, and Virginian Pilot, Thurs. 20 Apr 1899, p. 8, available online at newspapers.com)

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300 burials. The cemetery was historically linked to the church because many former members are interred therein; later, other community members were also interred. Originally, it was the Parr family burying ground. The first burial, that of John H. Parr, also has an unusual upright granite marker. His headstone has the masonic emblem and the same flag depicted in the aforementioned church window.

The cemetery grew in the early twentieth century as the Parr family began allowing their neighbors to use the burial ground. It is now the largest cemetery in this area of the county. In 1950, Morris Parr, son of John Parr, reserved two acres for a burial ground in a deed of sale of some of the family's land. The family deeded the same two acres to the Allwood Cemetery Association in 1963. Most of the inscribed markers are either upright or lawn-level granite stones.⁵

⁵ Amherst County Deed Books 1187, p. 360; 456, p. 369; 231, p. 81; and 148, p. 306.

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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

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Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
ca. 1930

Significant Dates
ca. 1930

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

N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

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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.)

El Bethel Methodist Church is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Constructed circa 1930, the church's design is a combination of Classical Revival and Late Gothic Revival elements. It is one of just two remaining public buildings of the once-thriving Allwood community and is one of Amherst County's two extant, Great Depression-era churches. The current edifice is the second church building on the site and was constructed with materials recycled from the earlier building, which dated to circa 1857. Significant features include the property's site design, temple form with portico, barrel-vaulted ceiling, and collection of stained-glass windows. El Bethel Methodist Church held regular church services in the building until 1989, when the greatly reduced membership merged with the Mount Pleasant Church and abandoned the El Bethel. In 1999, the Pedlar Ruritan Club adopted the building as a community improvement project and it was repaired and restored. The same year, the Methodist Church deeded the property to the El Bethel Community Association. It is now used for community and special events. The only alteration to the building since 1930 was the redesign of the pulpit during the 1960s. Otherwise, the church retains its original materials and is an excellent example of Great Depression-era construction in Amherst County. The Allwood Cemetery, behind the church, is historically associated with the church and contains many interments of former members. It is the only active public burial ground in the area and contains over 300 burials. El Bethel Methodist Church meets Criteria Consideration A for religious properties because its significance is derived from its architecture. The property meets Criteria Consideration D for cemeteries because the cemetery contributes to the property's overall historical significance, as it has been in continuous use since 1899; and it retains character-defining features such as granite grave markers and the overall layout that consists of a rectilinear plan with grassy paths neatly defining clusters of burials.

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

El Bethel Methodist Church is an unusual ecclesiastical edifice dating to the Great Depression in Amherst County. The combined Classical Revival and Late Gothic Revival elements make the building architecturally significant, yet the source of its design inspiration is unknown and its historical records are unfortunately lost. The church historical background is based in-part on bits of local lore.⁶ The building's high integrity of workmanship and materials and reuse of mid-19th-century structural and decorative elements also encapsulate vernacular construction methods of the 1930s.

El Bethel is the only church in Amherst County that features a temple-mount site design, while the 1930 building also features a character-defining, modestly scaled, one-story, front-gabled form with entrance portico, which was a form commonly used for rural churches

⁶ Church Records are not filed with Mount Pleasant or with the larger Methodist organizational library and are lost.

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throughout Amherst County from the early 19th century through the mid-20th century. The decorative details, stylistic influences, elevated site, and building form may have been inspired by the earlier 1857 church; this supposition is based on the only known description of the building, which states it was a larger building with a double entry and double-aisle arrangement. However, documented examples of other churches in rural Amherst County suggest that inspiration for El Bethel's design could have come from nearby churches also located along the Buffalo Springs Turnpike, namely St. Luke's Episcopal Church of Pedlar Mills (ca. 1837, DHR # 005-0016) and New Prospect Baptist Church (1847, DHR# 005-5273). St. Luke's is south of Allwood and has the classical temple form with a portico, while New Prospect in the neighboring community of Pleasant View north of Allwood has Gothic style lancet windows. All three are one-story, front-gabled buildings of modest scale, although New Prospect has been enlarged to include a rear ell.

Many early-twentieth-century church buildings in Amherst County, including others that dated to the Great Depression era, were replaced by larger ones constructed later in the twentieth century. El Bethel and Madison Heights Christian Church are the only two dating to the 1930s that are known to remain extant today. Madison Heights Christian Church was constructed in 1932 with recycled materials from the former Westminster Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg. It is a Late Gothic Revival, brick church with lancet windows in the nave.⁷ The only common characteristics between El Bethel and Madison Heights are their construction using recycled materials and their lancet windows.

El Bethel Church historically was at the heart of the Allwood community. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century community once included a general merchandise store, mill, carpentry shop, undertaker, and the 1939 school. The school, built on property adjacent to the church, is now a residential building. El Bethel is the only other still-extant public building in use in Allwood and its cemetery is the only community burial ground in this area of Amherst County.⁸

Historic Background

The congregation of El Bethel Methodist Church was organized in 1837. The Reverend Pitt Woodroof (1810-1898) was an early minister memorialized in one of the stained-glass windows as its first trustee. Woodroof was a circuit rider who preached at churches within a particular area. After organization, the congregants met at several places in the Allwood vicinity until circa 1857. At that point, they were able to purchase land and construct a new meetinghouse. No photographs or detailed descriptions of the first church building have been

⁷ Amherst County Heritage Book 1761-1999, Vol I, p. 54; Madison Heights Christian Church History available online at madisonheightschristian.com.

⁸ Amherst County Heritage, 1791-1999, Vol I, p. 50-51; and "El Bethel Church" and "Allwood" files from the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society.

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found. Local lore describes the earlier church as having been larger than its replacement, with double entries and double aisles. The congregation used this building regularly until 1930.⁹

In 1930, the congregation decided to raze the circa 1857 building and replace it with a smaller space. Some materials of the old building, likely the framing and siding materials, were reused in erecting the new building to save money, for it was the Great Depression, an era of many shortages.

From 1930 to 1989, regularly held services continued. At some point, the membership began to decline and in 1989 it had reached a point where the existing congregation could no longer financially maintain the church. They merged with the larger Mount Pleasant Methodist Church of Amherst and abandoned El Bethel. In 1999, the Pedlar Ruritan Club adopted the property for a community improvement project and repaired and restored the building. The community convinced the Methodist Church (Mount Pleasant Charge) to deed the building to the newly formed El Bethel Community Association. Today, the association maintains the building and opens it for special events.¹⁰

⁹ Amherst County Heritage, 1791-1999, Vol I, p. 50-51; "El Bethel Church" file from the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society; and Amherst County Deed Book DD, p. 456. El Bethel Methodist Church's historical records are lost and are not filed with Mount Pleasant or with the larger Methodist organizational library.

¹⁰ Amherst County Heritage, 1791-1999, Vol I, p. 50-51; "El Bethel Church" file from the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society; and Amherst County Deed Books 815, p. 189; and 221, p. 436.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Amherst County Deed Book, various books.

“Amherst County Heritage 1791-1999.” Vol. I., pp. 50-51.

“Amherst County Heritage 1791-2004.” Vol. II., pp. 25, 78.

Amherst County Museum and Historical Society, “El Bethel Church” and “Allwood” files.

History Tech and Landmark Preservation Associates. "Amherst County Historic Resources Survey Report July 2010." 2010.

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: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA;
Amherst County Museum and Historical Society, Amherst, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR# 005-5259

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 3 acres

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Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.64537 N | Longitude: -79.22092W |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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

The historic boundaries of the property coincide with the perimeters of three adjoined tax parcels recorded by Amherst County as parcels 61 A 7, 61 A 7A, and 61 A 7B. The true and correct boundaries are shown on the attached Aerial View and Tax Parcel Map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic boundaries coincide with the legal boundaries associated with the church property since construction of the first church building in 1857. The boundaries encompass the properties historic setting and all known historic resources. Parcel maps are available at the Amherst County Government Building and online at countyofamherst.com

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Sandra F. Esposito
organization: _____
street & number: 140 Cradon Hill Ln.
city or town: Amherst state: VA zip code: 24521
e-mail: espositosf@earthlink.net
telephone: 434-946-7496
date: October 2017

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.

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- **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: El Bethel Methodist Church

City or Vicinity: Amherst (vicinity)

County: Amherst County

State: Virginia

Photographer: Sandra F. Esposito

Date Photographed: October 2016

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

1 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0001

View: Primary building, west elevation, camera facing east

2 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0002

View: Primary building, west elevation detail, camera facing east

3 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0003

View: Primary building, north and west elevations, camera facing southeast

4 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0004

View: Primary building, north and east elevations, camera facing southwest

5 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0005

View: Primary building, east and south elevations, camera facing northwest

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6 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0006
View: Primary building, south and west elevations, camera facing northeast

7 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0007
View: Interior, primary building, camera facing east

8 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0008
View: Interior, primary building, camera facing west

9 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0009
View: Interior, primary building, detail of pews

10 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0010
View: Interior, primary building, window detail, camera facing west

11 of 11: VA_AmherstCounty_ElBethelMethodistChurch_0011
View: Cemetery, camera facing northwest

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.