



chancel built on a perpendicular north/south line. The Fellowship Hall/Annex, constructed in 1982, is attached to the church at the south end of the transept.

Behind the Church is the original cemetery with historic and veterans' markers on terrain that slopes gently upward to the west and north, with views of Hungars Creek. The Church is accessed from Bayside Road by entering at the northeast corner of the property utilizing a grass/gravel driveway that passes in front of the Church before exiting in the southeast. There is a flattened parking area in front of the fellowship hall.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Vernacular Gothic Revival

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:
 Unknown

If the builder is known, please list here: Unknown (originally built by rural black craftsman)

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1867 (school built), 1883 (original chapel) and 1886 with renovations in 1928

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

Shorter's Chapel A.M.E. Church has stood on a gentle rise along Bayside Road in Bridgetown, Northampton County for over 150 years, quietly anchoring one of the oldest communities on Virginia's Eastern Shore. It remains an active congregation today, gathering weekly for worship and opening its doors three to four times a year for community events that reflect the same spirit of collective care that built it: an annual back-to-school drive, a Thanksgiving dinner that feeds both the congregation and residents of Dogwood Assisted Living Facility, and a Christmas celebration that draws the broader Bridgetown community. The property also carries a tradition of camp meetings that stretched back to the Reconstruction era, when such gatherings were among the few spaces where freed Black people could assemble, organize, and worship freely.

The primary structure is a 1-story, wood-framed church built on a T-plan, with a 2-story bell tower at the northeast corner bearing a multi-faceted spire. Investigation supports the oral history that part of the pulpit is the original Bridgetown School foundations which forms portions of the 10' x 25'6" west exterior lean-to structure. The transept and walled-off wings are believed to constitute the original 1883 chapel



with additions in 1886. It is unclear if the 30' x 45' nave (sanctuary) was constructed prior to 1928 when major work was completed under Rev. L. P. Herring and Rt. Rev. A. L. Gaines adding the choir loft and additional wings, as documented on the cornerstone inscription: "Shorters Chapel A.M.E. Church, 1886 Rebuilt 1928." The fellowship hall, a 28' x 40' addition, was constructed in 1982 on a concrete block foundation at the south end of the church, with an ADA-accessible concrete ramp (2001). The building's total footprint is approximately 4,254 square feet.

The exterior is clad in painted aluminum and T-1-11 wood siding over the original frame. The foundation combines single-brick construction under the nave and brick piers with brick infill. The roof, a composition shingle gable shared by both the church and fellowship hall, has been patched to its limits, with at least three layers of shingles accumulated over the years. The large nave windows, originally stained glass, were replaced with single-glaze amber ripple glass circa 1977, and the large window on the south end of the front façade has been closed entirely.

Inside, the raised pulpit and chancel are defined by an archway that indicates the former east wall of the schoolhouse which would include the pastor's study. The 1928 choir loft is on the right. The nave retains oak pews dating to circa 1974, yellow pine floors with carpeted aisles, and a 10-foot dropped acoustic tile ceiling that conceals an original 15-foot lathe and plaster ceiling above, which may retain its historic vaulted finish. The vestibule was created in 1967 by a partition spanning the east end of the church. The bell tower, which houses the original, though currently non-functional, bell, has had its base converted to HVAC storage. The electrical system is original knob-and-tube wiring.

The overall condition of the property is fair. Little of the original interior or exterior fabric is currently exposed, layers of well-intentioned but aging upgrades are now in need of replacement. This is a building that has been loved and maintained by a congregation of modest means for generations, and that love has kept it standing. Today, it stands at a critical threshold, where stabilization and preservation require resources beyond what the congregation can provide alone. Grant funding is actively being pursued to ensure that Shorter's Chapel endures as both a living place of worship and an irreplaceable witness to the history of Black life on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- Cemetery, located to the rear of the church, containing approximately two hundred graves housing the remains of former pastors, trustees, veterans, and members. Condition of markers varies, with some gravesites in need of repair. Estimated date of earliest interments unknown but likely contemporaneous with the congregation's founding circa 1867.
- Church identification sign, located at the road frontage. Good condition. Estimated construction date unknown.
- Northampton County Local Historic Marker installed September 2025.
- Northern Parcel: 2 acres



4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Shortly after the Civil War, a group of newly freed men and women in Bridgetown, Virginia gathered in a small schoolhouse on a gentle rise above Hungars Creek, not just to learn, but to pray. That building, the Freedmen's Bureau Bridgetown School, established for the formerly enslaved of Northampton County's Eastern Shore, was the beginning of what would become Shorter's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The same benches that held students during the week held a congregation on Sundays. In that single structure, two of the most powerful institutions in the post-Civil War Black community, the school and the church, were one. Inseparable institutions through which religious, social, economic, and political life were all discussed, organized, and built.

On 28 May 1867, James C. Toy (c. 1830s – 1914 - buried at Arlington National Cemetery) sold an acre of land for \$60 to the trustees of the Colored School of Bridgetown. A white man from Maryland, Toy joined the Union Army in January 1864 and volunteered to lead colored troops, rising to the rank of Captain of the 2nd United States Colored Cavalry Regiment. After his service, he moved to Northampton County and purchased land to farm, an acre of which he sold to the school. Starting in 1866, Toy was an advocate for the Colored School (at times under threat to his family) with Freedmen's Bureau correspondence indicating his endorsement of "a school house and church" to provide the education of 100 scholars. His later requests for window sashes for the school match the size of the windows in Shorter's Chapel's pulpit. Toy was one of two Republicans elected to represent Accomac and Northampton counties at Virginia's Constitutional Convention of 1868. He served in the House of Delegates 1869-1871, losing a close election to Peter Jacob Carter.

After the school was built, Reverend John Henry Offer, born free in Maryland, a sergeant in the United States Colored Troops, and the second A.M.E. minister to serve Virginia's Eastern Shore, formally founded the Bridgetown congregation among others. Worship began in the school with permission from the school trustees. The church was named for Bishop James A. Shorter, co-founder of Wilberforce University, the first college in America owned and operated by African Americans.

In 1896, the school trustees transferred legal title to the A.M.E. church trustees for \$5, formalizing the transition from schoolhouse to sanctuary, from borrowed space to owned land, from provisional freedom to permanent institution.

That permanence was tested almost immediately. When the Ku Klux Klan established a violent presence in Northampton County circa 1868, the Black community gathered at the church, formed the Union League, and marched eleven miles north toward Belle Haven, where the Klan had threatened to appear. The Klan did not come. According to the memoir of Leonard Treherne (1857-1924), Klan activity subsequently disappeared from Northampton County entirely and did not return. The church on the hill was not only a place of worship, it was a place from which people marched.



Shorter’s Chapel property sits at the heart of one of the oldest communities in America. Bridgetown, established circa 1643 at the head of Hungars Creek, was a crossroads of commerce, law, and faith for centuries. Hungars Creek was a working waterway - boats arrived carrying goods, settlers, and, for generations, enslaved people. The same waters that once carried slave ships carried, after the Civil War, the lumber Reverend John Henry Offer transported by boat from Baltimore to build the first A.M.E. meeting house on the Eastern Shore in Eastville. Today Shorter's Chapel and the nearby Hungars Episcopal Church (1623) are the last vestiges of the once thriving community of Bridgetown.

Shorter’s Chapel was commended by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017, designated among the first sites under the Northampton County Local Historical Landmark Program in September 2025, and is featured on the Northampton County driving tour "Landmarks: African American Historic Sites."

Shorter's Chapel is a living congregation carrying forward a legacy that begins with the moment a people who had just emerged from bondage decided that the first thing they would build was a place to learn and a place to pray. That building, its heritage and legacy still stand.

Sources: DHR Architectural Survey Form, DHR ID 065-0447 (1995); *Revival's Children: A Religious History of Virginia's Eastern Shore*, Kirk Mariner; *Life for Me Ain't Been No Crystal Stair*, Frances Bibbins Latimer; Senate Joint Resolution No. 361, Virginia General Assembly, 2017; Shorter's Chapel A.M.E. Church 140th Anniversary Program (2006); Northampton County Property Records, Vision Government Solutions (2026), Northampton County Deed Book 37 Page 63, Northampton County Deed Book 49 Page 98; Wikipedia *James C. Toy*; Freedmen’s Bureau correspondence.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: Public\Local Public\State Public\Federal

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Shorter’s Chapel A.M.E Church

organization: _____

street & number: 10228 Bayside Road

city or town: Machipongo state: Virginia zip code: 23405

e-mail: douglasstrand1@gmail.com telephone: (757) 710-8444

Legal Owner’s Signature:  _____
Signed by: D4D09F3AC01349E...

Date: 4/30/2026

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••



DHR | Virginia Department of Historic Resources

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Reverend Douglas Strand

Daytime Telephone: (757) 710-8444

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Reverend Douglas Strand

organization: Shorter's Chapel A.M.E. Church

street & number: 10228 Bayside Road

city or town: Machipongo state: Virginia zip code: 23405


e-mail: douglasstrand1@gmail.com telephone: (757) 710-8444

Date: 4/30/2026

PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!

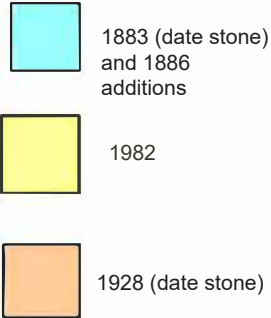
PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Shorter's Chapel A.M.E. Church
Northampton County, VA
DHR ID# 065-0447

 Proposed Boundary

0 200
 Feet



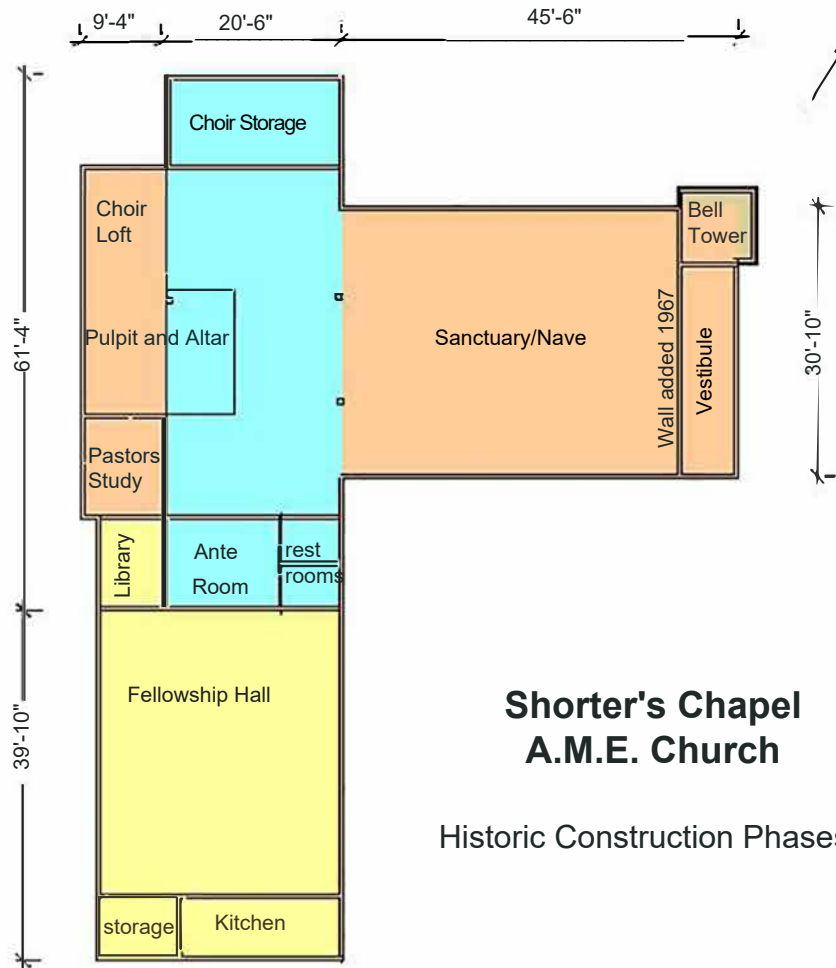


Based on oral history
Pulpit and Altar are
believed to be
Freedmen's Bureau
Bridgetown School

1867



(Interior wall locations
not to scale)



Shorter's Chapel A.M.E. Church

Historic Construction Phases



**SHORTER'S CHAPEL
A.M.E. CHURCH**
BRIDGETOWN, VA

CHURCH SCHOOL 9:30 AM
SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE 10:30 AM

"THE CHURCH THAT SITS ON THE HILL
WITH DOORS THAT SWING ON BRITISH HINGES"

PASTOR D. STRAND

**SHORTER'S CHAPEL
A.M.E. CHURCH**
BRIDGETOWN, VA

CHURCH SCHOOL 9:30 AM
SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE 10:30 AM

"THE CHURCH THAT SITS ON THE HILL
WITH DOORS THAT SWING ON BRITISH HINGES"

PASTOR D. STRAND





















S...

ANNE E. CHURCH

1886 REBURIED 1928

Rev. L. P. Herring B.D., D.D.

R. A. L. Gaines D.D., Ph.D.















AUG. 30

1886







"IN MEMORY OF
DORIS WILSON
AUGUST 1925 -
MAY 1998"

"MR. GEORGE WISE"

"MR. & MRS. GEORGE E. Sauer
BY
Sister M. and George R. Sauer"

















COR LYONS
1872

MARTHA BRYANT
APRIL 26, 1921
SEPT. 22, 1994

WE WILL LAUGH OFTEN WHEN WE THINK
OF YOU CAUSE WHEN WE MISS YOU
I ALWAYS LOVE YOU

FANNIE DICKENS
ROWLEY
AUG. 9, 1907
AUG. 5, 1994

NEVISON O.
COLLINS
PVT
US ARMY
WORLD WAR II
DEC 13 1927
MAY 4 1995

GARET E. BAILEY
MAY 11 1902
FEBRUARY 14 1990





SHORTER'S CHAPEL

A. M. E. CHURCH WORSHIP BEGAN
CIRCA 1866 BY REV JOHN OFFER
IN THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU
BRIDGETOWN SCHOOL. CHURCH
ADDITIONS ADDED 1883 - 1886.
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY TOURISM FUND









SHORTER'S CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH BRIDGETOWN, VA

CHURCH SCHOOL
SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

9:30 AM
11:00 AM

"THE CHURCH THAT SITS ON THE HILL
WITH DOORS THAT SWING ON FRIENDLY HINGES"

PASTOR D. STRAND

SHORTER'S CHAPEL
A.M.E. CHURCH
BRIDGETOWN, VA
SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE
9:30 AM & 11:00 AM
CHURCH SCHOOL
9:30 AM



Bridgetown



SHORTER'S CHAPEL AME CHURCH
BRIDGETOWN, VA.
REV. AG STANLEY PASTOR