

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic      Gilboa Methodist Church

and or common

2. Location

street & number      West side U.S. 64, .2 mile north of S.R. 1102      N/A not for publication

city, town      Salem       vicinity of

state      North Carolina      code      37      county      Burke      code      23

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name      Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church,  
Marion District

street & number      P. O. Box 820

city, town      Marion      N/A vicinity of      state      North Carolina      28752

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.      Register of Deeds

street & number      Burke County Courthouse, 201 South Green Street

city, town      Morganton      state      North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title      Burke County Historic  
Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible?       yes       no

date      1983-84       federal       state       county       local

depository for survey records      North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Western Office

city, town      13 Veterans Drive, Asheville      state      North Carolina

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Gilboa Methodist Church (1879), the oldest surviving frame church structure in Burke County, is located in a wooded setting about five miles southwest of Morganton, North Carolina, in the community of Salem. The building stands at the end of a dirt lane leading from the main road. A cemetery with graves of congregation members, some dating back to the early nineteenth century, faces the front of the church. The simple two by four-bay, rectangular structure has a stone pier foundation, clapboard siding, and a standing seam metal roof with a raking soffit under the eaves. The church building and site have excellent historic integrity and are virtually unaltered. The structure is unoccupied and is in generally good condition.

The facade, which faces southwest, features two sets of double-leaf wooden entry doors which are approached by slate steps. The doors have three recessed panels each, and are set into flat surrounds with echinus moldings forming slightly peaked lintels. Single-pane clear glass transoms are located above each set of doors. At the center of the facade, a semi-circular gable vent infill with a roll molding on its upper edge is inscribed with the words "Gilboa 1879 Church."

The northwest and southeast, or side, elevations are four bays each. The six-over-six double-hung sash windows on both sides are evenly spaced and have plain surrounds flush with the structure walls. Original shutter hinges remain on all the windows. A brick chimney, not original to the building, is located toward the center of the northwest side, while a stovepipe is located on the southeast. The northeast, or rear, elevation has no windows or other noteworthy details.

The interior of Gilboa Church follows a straightforward rectangular plan, with a semi-enclosed pulpit unit in the northeast, or chancel, end. The carpeted floor is of wood plank construction and the walls are finished with horizontally-laid tongue-and-groove flushboard sheathing. The ceiling is composed of wide beaded tongue-and-groove flushboards. A stovepipe outlet, site of an early heating system, is located at the center of the ceiling. Four hooks, from which lanterns hung at one time, are suspended from the ceiling alongside modern electric fixtures. The pews are of simple wood plank construction and are arranged in three sections of twelve rows each, forming two aisles. Those pews in the side sections are attached to the walls of the church on one end. Three rows of pews for choir use face each other to the sides of the chancel area. The windows on each side wall have plain enframements and sills with rolled edges.

The raised chancel has curved corners at its front and is encircled by a low rail with turned balusters. The podium at the center of the chancel is part of a semi-enclosed tripartite unit with recessed panels carved on all faces. Openings to either side of the podium itself provide access to this space. A bench is located behind the podium and is part of the unit. The rear wall of the church is highlighted by an ogee-shaped blind arch which springs from flat pilasters with molded caps. A hand-carved wooden dove above the apex of the arch symbolizes the presence of the holy spirit.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<b>Specific dates</b>	1879	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Unknown	

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Gilboa Methodist Church (1879) is the oldest extant frame church structure in Burke County. In its straightforward simplicity of form and detail, it epitomizes the character of rural North Carolina churches of the nineteenth century. The cemetery in front of the building, associated with the beginnings of the congregation, contains some tombstones dating back to the early 1800s. The formation of the congregation, believed to be a Mother Church of Methodism in the county, was most likely an outgrowth of the efforts of Bishop Francis Asbury, a Methodist missionary influential in establishing the denomination in North Carolina during the 1790s and early 1800s. The present church structure was erected by congregation members under the leadership of the Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey, who donated the land for the church and served as a preacher in the new building.

### CRITERIA ASSESSMENT:

- A. The history of Gilboa Methodist Church is tied to the earliest establishment of Methodism in Burke County and reflects rural religious practices in Western North Carolina during the 1800s.
- C. Gilboa Church is the oldest surviving frame church building in Burke County. Its overall simplicity of form and architectural detail combined with its clear identity as a church make it an important element in the rural cultural landscape.

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Gilboa Methodist Church, situated in an undisturbed rural setting in the vicinity of Salem, North Carolina, is the oldest extant frame church building in Burke County. The building was constructed in 1879 and is the third structure used by the congregation. The current church, which is sparsely decorated and follows a simple one-room plan, symbolizes the character of religious worship in rural areas of North Carolina during the second half of the nineteenth century. Gilboa is considered to be a Mother Church of Methodism in Burke County, tracing the faith back to the establishment of the denomination in Western North Carolina during the 1790s and early 1800s through the efforts of Bishop Francis Asbury.

Information surrounding the organization date of the Gilboa Church congregation is difficult to substantiate. As early as 1793, a log church is believed to have existed a short distance from the site of the present building.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Asbury's journal documents his travels as a Methodist missionary through Burke County in that year, lending credence to this tradition.<sup>2</sup> The minutes of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Church, of which the Morganton circuit was a part, first mention Gilboa Church in 1800, suggesting that at that time, it was the largest, wealthiest, and best organized Methodist congregation in Burke County.<sup>3</sup> The first Gilboa Church is said to have been erected on the site of a Presbyterian camp ground, and perhaps was shared by the two denominations.<sup>4</sup> The earliest known deed executed by trustees of Gilboa is dated August 26, 1858, although the land purchased at this time was in use earlier, as evidenced by a reference in the deed to houses already existing on the site.<sup>5</sup> The date of construction for the second church structure is not known, but it was apparently a log building like its predecessor, as logs from this church were used to construct the underpinnings of the current structure.<sup>6</sup>

The present frame church, known as Mount Gilboa at the time of completion, was built on a one-half-acre site adjacent to the location of the two earlier structures and acquired by the congregation from the Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey in 1874.<sup>7</sup> Reverend Dorsey (1805-1890) was the second son of Elisha and Delilah Ashe Dorsey, who are believed to have been charter members of Gilboa Church and are buried in a family plot in the church cemetery.<sup>8</sup> Many descendants of the Dorsey family, including the children of Reverend John W. Dorsey, Thomas' brother, were members of Gilboa Church.<sup>9</sup> The Reverend Thomas Dorsey owned a considerable amount of property in the vicinity of the church and was "a local preacher, justice of the peace and prosperous farmer."<sup>10</sup> Under his guidance as a member of the Board of Trustees of the church, the congregation erected the new frame building in 1879 at a cost of about 700 dollars.<sup>11</sup>

The church, which is similar in appearance to other rural houses of worship of the day, was dedicated on October 19, 1879, at a service led by Reverend P. F. W. Stamey, a preacher on the Morganton Circuit. The dedication ceremonies were said to have been attended by 600 people. The new structure was praised as "a splendid building (which) will compare favorably with many village churches."<sup>12</sup> Practically all the interior decoration and furnishings were executed by congregation members, including the dove atop the ogee arch in the chancel end, whittled by Taylor Duckworth and placed in the building around 1900.<sup>13</sup> A silver communion set, given to the church by the Reverend Thomas Dorsey, is now in the possession of his descendants.<sup>14</sup>

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After the building was completed, church records show that Thomas Dorsey served as a preacher there for several years, along with others on the Morganton circuit who rotated among the rural Methodist churches.<sup>15</sup> At the Third Quarterly Conference for the Morganton Circuit, held at Gilboa Church in 1888, Reverend Dorsey donated 400 dollars to the church, the interest on which was to be used to support the itinerant preachers who served the congregation. Dorsey further stipulated that the interest be used for educational purposes in the vicinity of the church if Gilboa ever ceased to exist.<sup>16</sup> Dorsey's obituary attests to the fact that he was beloved by the congregation and community, and remembered for his liberal support of the church.<sup>17</sup> Other preachers associated with Gilboa Church during the early years in the new building include J. F. England (1883-1885), J. W. Callahan (1885), T. L. Triplett (1886), R. S. Abernethy (1887), and C. C. Brothers (1888).<sup>18</sup>

Members of the Gilboa congregation mainly resided in the rural community of Salem and vicinity, an area populated by a large number of Methodists.<sup>20</sup> The dirt road which presently leads to the building was at one time a rural highway passing by the church, which attendees traversed on horseback or on foot. William Marvin Rudicil, a now-deceased descendant of the Reverend Thomas Dorsey, remembered that "Uncle Tommy," as he was called, rode his horse to church every Sunday and always hitched it to a certain tree.<sup>20</sup> The simple structure with its understated interior furnishings and peaceful setting undoubtedly provided a welcome respite after the considerable effort required to attend services in the building. As suggested by the church's physical appearance, the services held there were fairly rudimentary and intimate. The congregation did not have a formal choir, but members who volunteered would sit in the front of the church in the area designated for choir use in order to lead the singing during the service. The pew directly in front of the pulpit was known as the "Mourner's Bench," while a section of pews facing the center of the church to one side of the pulpit was referred to as the "Amen Corner."<sup>21</sup> The congregation had about 216 members around the turn of the century, and between 1871 and 1906, approximately 140 baptisms were performed in the church. Local family names traditionally associated with the congregation include Rudicil, Hennessee, Duckworth, and Ferree.<sup>22</sup>

Gilboa Church continued in use until the mid-1940s, at which time the congregation became too dispersed throughout the county to make weekly services feasible. Services were reduced to several times a year until the site was only used for annual home-comings.<sup>23</sup> The church was briefly occupied by another denomination during the 1950s, but has been essentially vacant since that time, standing as a visual reminder of the character of rural religious worship during an earlier era of Burke County history.

As Eliza Davidson notes in his study of North Carolina country churches, churches are "next to dwellings and farm structures . . . the most frequently found buildings in the rural landscape," and a crucial focus of social and spiritual life.<sup>24</sup> Most built before 1929 were of wood and many were one-room structures. The last half-century has altered or destroyed so many of these buildings that intact, well-preserved examples are increasingly rare. Thus, the architectural significance of Gilboa Church is considerable as an example of the simplicity and clarity characteristic of the vernacular country church.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Gordon Boger, "Gilboa was Mother Church of Methodism," News Herald, April 2, 1976, p. 4-A.

<sup>2</sup>Elmer T. Clark, Methodism in Western North Carolina (n.p.: Historical Society of the Western North Carolina Conference, 1966), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>H. L. Millner, Outline History of the First Methodist Church of Morganton (n.p.: n.p., 1944), p. 12 and Cordelia Camp, Sketches of Burke County (Morganton, N.C.: Privately Printed, 1954), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Sketches of Burke County, pp. 13-14. This information is corroborated by a speech made at the church several years ago, the text of which is in the possession of the Misses Nan, Mary, and Lillian Rudicil of Morganton, descendants of Gilboa congregation members. In the speech, which was delivered by an unidentified individual, recollections of elderly members of Gilboa Church are cited in regard to the Presbyterian camp ground tradition.

<sup>5</sup>The deed, executed between R. V. McGimsey, J. C. Tate, Samuel McD. Tate, Mary J. Adams, Zebulon B. Vance and wife H. E. Vance, and E. E. Greenlee and wife S. L. Greenlee, grantors, and Thomas A. Dorsey, John Dorsey, Ben Stacy, Daniel Stacy, and W. B. Patton, grantees, is for a two-acre plot of land. In his News Herald article cited above, Gordon Boger states that the grantees who can be identified were all Presbyterians, supporting the theory that a Presbyterian camp existed on the site. The deed is in private possession.

<sup>6</sup>This tradition was mentioned by the Rudicil sisters during an interview on June 13, 1984, and is also referred to in Sketches of Burke County, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Burke County Register of Deeds, Book D, p. 247. The deed is dated October 20, 1874.

<sup>8</sup>David B. Dorsey, Elisha Dorsey of Burke County, North Carolina and His Descendants (Charlotte, N.C.: Merit Press, 1975), pp. 18-20.

<sup>9</sup>Elisha Dorsey of Burke County, North Carolina and His Descendants, p. 36 and Gilboa Methodist Church, The Complete Church Register: 1879-1944, Register of Members, n.p. The church records are in the possession of the Rudicils.

<sup>10</sup>Outline History of the First Methodist Church of Morganton, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup>"New Church Dedication," Blue Ridge Blade, October 25, 1879, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>"New Church Dedication," p. 3.

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<sup>13</sup>This information appears in a pamphlet entitled "United Methodist Church: The First Edition (Morganton, N.C.: First Methodist Church, August, 1983), p. 3, in the possession of the Rudicils.

<sup>14</sup>Elisha Dorsey of Burke County, North Carolina and His Descendants, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Gilboa Methodist Church, The Complete Church Register: 1879-1944, Register of Pastors, n.p. A list of the churches served in this rotation appears in a notice entitled "First Round Appointments for Morganton Circuit Conference Year 1880," in the Blue Ridge Blade, November 22, 1879, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Morganton Star, July 20, 1888, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Reverend Thomas A. Dorsey obituary in the Morganton Herald, August 14, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Gilboa Methodist Church, The Complete Church Register: 1879-1944, Register of Pastors, n.p.

<sup>19</sup>Burke County Historical Society, The Heritage of Burke County: 1981 (Morganton, N.C.: Burke County Historical Society, 1981), p. 50.

<sup>20</sup>Elisha Dorsey of Burke County, North Carolina and His Descendants, p. 31 and recollections of the Rudicils.

<sup>21</sup>Gilboa Methodist Church, The Complete Church Register: 1879-1944, Registers of Members and Baptisms, n.p.

<sup>22</sup>Recollections of Nan Rudicil, based on discussions with her father, William Marvin Rudicil.

<sup>23</sup>"Vandals Damage Historic Church, Now Unused," News Herald, April 2, 1968, p. 2-A.

<sup>24</sup>Eliza Davidson, "North Carolina Country Churches: Explorations in the Mountains and Tidewater," in Doug Swaim (ed.), Carolina Dwelling (Raleigh, N.C.: NCSU School of Design, 1978), p. 184.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See separate sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .48

Quadrangle name Morganton South

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	7	4	3	4	0	3	0	3	9	4	9	3	9	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes the lot defined as Lot #4, Block 3, Map 91-36 in the Burke County Tax Supervisor's Office, approximately 210' x 100'.

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dana E. Mintzer, Preservation Consultant

organization North Carolina Division of Archives and History

date June 20, 1984

street & number 13 Veterans Drive

telephone 704/298-5024

city or town Asheville

state North Carolina

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature William S. King

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date July 12, 1984

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



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- Clark, Elmer T. Methodism in Western North Carolina. n.p.: Historical Society of the Western North Carolina Conference, 1966.
- Davidson, Eliza. "North Carolina Country Churches: Explorations in the Mountains and Tidewater," in Doug Swaim (ed.) Carolina Dwelling. Raleigh, N.C.: NCSU School of Design, 1978, pp. 184-195.
- Dorsey, David B. Elisha Dorsey of Burke County, North Carolina and His Descendants. Charlotte, N.C.: Merit Press, 1975.
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- Millner, H. L. Outline History of the First Methodist Church of Morganton. n.p.: n.p., 1944.
- "New Church Dedication." Blue Ridge Blade, October 25, 1879, p. 3.
- ("Reverend Thomas Dorsey Donates Money to Gilboa Church.") Morganton Star, July 20, 1888, p. 5.
- ("Reverend Thomas Dorsey Obituary.") Morganton Herald, August 14, 1890, p. 3.
- "Vandals Damage Historic Church, Now Unused." News Herald, April 2, 1968, p. 2-A.
- "United Methodist Church: The First Edition." Morganton, N.C.: First Methodist Church, August, 1983.

Interview

Nan, Mary, and Lillian Rudicil, June 13, 1984. The Rudicils, descendants of Reverend Thomas Dorsey, were extremely helpful in providing general information and primary source material related to Gilboa Church.



