

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Thomas Chapel AME Zion Church

Black Mountain, Buncombe County, BN1687, Listed April 30, 2009

Nomination by Sybil Argintar

Photographs by Sybil Argintar, March 2008



Façade view



Rear and side view

**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property

historic name Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 300 Cragmont Road not for publication N/A

city or town Black Mountain vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Buncombe code 021 zip code 28711

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Name of Property

Buncombe, North Carolina
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Religion Sub: Religious facility
Funerary Cemetery

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: work in progress Sub: _____
Funerary Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
Gothic Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
foundation concrete
roof asphalt
walls weatherboard
other _____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Name of Property

Buncombe, North Carolina
County and State

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 a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1922

Significant Dates

1922

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kennedy, Ervin

Lytle, Thomas

Stepp, Ed

Areas of Significance

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Western Office Archives and History

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Name of Property

Buncombe, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.31 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	378660	3942020
2	_____	_____	_____

	Zone	Easting	Northing
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____
	_____	See continuation sheet.	

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sybil H. Argintar

organization Southeastern Preservation Services date October 3, 2008

street & number 166 Pearson Drive telephone (828) 230-3773

city or town Asheville state NC zip code 28801

12. Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church Restoration Corporation c/o Dorothy Jones

street & number P.O. Box 895 telephone (828) 669-2625

city or town Black Mountain state NC zip code 28711

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

Materials (continued)

Foundation: brick

Summary

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church is located west of downtown Black Mountain, Buncombe County, North Carolina. Facing south towards Fortune Street at Cragmont Road, the 1922 chapel is sited high on a hill, and is surrounded by a cemetery. From the crest of the hill, Cragmont Road runs northwest. Below the hill, where the chapel is sited, it runs in a northeast direction.

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. 1922.

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church is a frame building measuring approximately thirty-six feet by fifty feet. The one-story, front-gable, building has weatherboard siding, flush board soffits, rafter ends covered by fascia boards, a concrete block foundation with a few remaining original brick piers, and an asphalt roof. A cornerstone at the southeast corner notes the construction date of 1922. There is a one-story, front-gable entry vestibule on the south side capped by a tall, pyramidal-roof bell tower. Windows along the three-bay east and west side elevations are double-hung, with three lights in the pointed upper sash and two below. All lower sash panes are white-washed.¹ There is a single interior concrete block replacement chimney stack located approximately at the center of the west side of the building. On the south side, or façade, are four-panel with fanlight double-leaf entry doors, which are modern replacements within an original opening. This front entry, along with an additional door on the west side, was the original entrances to the building. The west side was used for entry into the building for services, but the double doors could be opened whenever funeral services were held for ease in transporting a coffin.² The west entry door is now enclosed but concrete steps remain in place. There is a pointed outline above the current front doors, which appears to have originally been a large window opening above the doors. The bell tower has louvered, pointed arched openings on three sides. There is a projecting one-story, end-gable bay at the rear (north elevation) of the building which served as seating for the pastor. Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church maintained this European-based tradition in the design of the building, where the congregation maintained the main section of the chapel and the pastor was responsible for upkeep of the rear.³ Windows on the east and west elevations of this bay are double-hung two-over-two sash, also with the panes of the lower sash white-washed.

Inside, there are two five-panel doors opening from the vestibule into the sanctuary. The vestibule originally contained a coat rack and a book rack.⁴ The sanctuary is a large open room with an angled, beaded board ceiling that has recently been replaced with in-kind materials due to severe deterioration.

¹ Whitewashing the windows was a common practice so members would not be distracted by looking outside and would focus on the service. Interview by Sybil Argintar with Dorothy Jones, March 7, 2008.

² Rutherford, Corrie. Long-time resident of Black Mountain and descendent of original founders. Interview by Dorothy Jones, June 12, 2008, and Burnette, Mary O., descendent in the Burnette family of Black Mountain, and resident of Black Mountain from 1931 – 1959, interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

³ Burnette, Mary O., interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

⁴ Kennedy, James. Life-long church member and resident of Black Mountain. Interview by Dorothy Jones, April 1, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

Floors are heart pine, some of which have recently been replaced, also with in-kind materials. Walls are plaster and dark-stained baseboards are approximately eight inches high. Woodworking around the windows is also dark-stained. The pulpit at the north end of the room is separated from the rest of the room by a step and a low, curving wood divider wall, which is original. Just behind the low wall were a small communion table and two chairs.⁵ To the rear of the pulpit is the small alcove where the pastor sat while waiting to speak. The choir gathered around the organ when they sang.⁶ A new wood stove has been added on the west wall, along with a concrete block stack. According to members of the church, the layout of the furnishings in the sanctuary consisted of rows of benches running east-west, with several turned in a north-south direction at the front. A wood stove was previously located just below the pulpit, between the rows of benches. There is one original hand-hewn bench remaining, in the possession of a long-time church member, and this will be duplicated in the current restoration efforts.

Surrounding the church on three sides is a cemetery containing the graves of the founding members of the church, including those of the Stepp, Lytle, Burnette, and Daugherty families.⁷ The oldest graves are located at the northwest corner of the land, with the most recent graves located on the east side of the church.⁸ Markers all face towards the east. The hillside slopes gently from the northwest to the southeast with no definitive walkways. There are scattered deciduous trees throughout the cemetery, with a wooded area located at the northwestern boundary. Early graves were often marked by a simple protruding stone, so dates of some of the oldest graves are not known and they will forever remain unknown other than through family oral history.⁹ Some of the oldest markers in the cemetery include that of M. E. and M. H. Stepp, (1893-1915), Wilson Daugherty (1863 – 1918) and Minnie Stepp (1881 – 1918)¹⁰ Markers range from simple hand-lettered phrases to more refined engraved stones in rough-hewn granite or polished marble. All of the land currently associated with the church and cemetery has been part of the property since it was donated to the community in 1892.¹¹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rutherford, Corrie. Interview by Dorothy Jones, June 12, 2008.

⁷ Now known as Oak Grove Cemetery (according to the sign), this cemetery does not appear to have been associated with the first church building. It appears, although not fully documented, that the first church stood on a nearby site.

⁸ Burnette, Mary Othello. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Other family names in the cemetery include Anderson, Bell, Black, Bowen, Brisco, Brown, Burgess, Burgin, Burnett, Canady, Carpenter, Chambers, Cole, Copning, Daniel, Daniels, Daugherty, Davidson, Dickerson, Dillingham, Dixon, Durham, Fair, Forney, Fortune, Foster, Gardner, Gentry, Gordon, Gragg, Greenlee, Griggs, Hamilton, Harbert, Harbison, Hardy, Hayden, Hooper, Hughes, Jackson, Jones, Kennedy, Koon, Lawton, Logan, Long, Lynch, Lytle, Miller, Moore, Morehead, Nabors, Parks, Pertiller, Roseboro, Rutherford, Simmons, Stafford, Stepp, Strickland, Thompson, Weaver, Wells, Whittington, Wilson, and Woodruff. All names compiled by Pat Jones, descendent in the Stepp family.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

Summary

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, with a period of significance of 1922, the date of its construction, meets Criterion C for architecture. Built by the descendants of freed slaves in Black Mountain, North Carolina, it is locally significant as an intact example of a Gothic Revival-influenced church. The church and associated cemetery which surrounds the building meet Criteria Consideration A due to the building's architectural significance.

Historic Background and Social History

Black Mountain is located in western North Carolina, approximately twenty miles from Asheville, forming the eastern edge of Buncombe County. The town is located in the Swannanoa Valley, a broad valley approximately eighteen miles long and surrounded by the Black and Craggy Mountains to the north, and the Swannanoa Mountains to the south. Two major streams run through the town, Flat Creek and the North Fork of the Swannanoa River.

Since the late 1600s, there have been black families in western North Carolina, especially in Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, McDowell, and Rutherford Counties, even though slavery was not a major social institution in the mountains.¹² Most slave owners had one to five slaves, with the white landowners often working their farms alongside the slaves.¹³ As early as the 1780s, there were African American families in the Black Mountain area. Many of these early families came to the area as slaves, and decided to stay after emancipation. Others chose Black Mountain as a place to live due to the climate, availability of jobs, and general acceptance of the black residents within the community at large. These early families founded churches, schools, businesses, and social lodges. Into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were also free blacks in the mountains, working as farm laborers, artisans, in stores, and, in the 1820s, as laborers on the Buncombe Turnpike. From 1850 to 1860 the number of slaves in Buncombe County increased, but there were also free blacks living in the county. In the 1860s, the free blacks were employed in a variety of occupations including barbers, blacksmiths, chair makers, harness makers, miners, saddlers, seamstresses, tailors, tanners, wagoners, weavers, farmers, hatters, carpenters, hack drivers, and well diggers. Most, however, were farmers who knew how to work the land and survive.¹⁴

The town of Black Mountain was originally known as Grey Eagle. As in many other mountain communities, it was not until the arrival of the Western North Carolina Railroad in 1880 that Grey Eagle began to see more rapid growth in terms of tourism, residential neighborhoods, commercial development, and religious development. As the railroad began to be built into the mountains in the late nineteenth century, much of the labor was provided by blacks, and, with the coming of the railroad, the construction industry boomed, and blacks also provided much of that labor.¹⁵ The railroad brought building supplies

¹² Davis, Lenwood. The Black Heritage of Western North Carolina. Asheville, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Asheville, 1984, p. 4.

¹³ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 16 - 17.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 5-6.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

and tourists, making the period from 1880 through 1915 a prosperous time for the town. Lumber became a major industry, meeting the needs of the building boom that ensued after the arrival of the railroad.¹⁶ The arrival of the railroad had yet another effect on the town, in that the rail station name was changed from Grey Eagle to Black Mountain by the railroad company and the town was officially incorporated as such on March 4, 1893.¹⁷

The town of Black Mountain continued to grow in the late 1910s and 1920s. Hundreds of summer visitors continued to come to the area, and many families made the choice to settle in Black Mountain on a permanent basis due to the magnificent mountain scenery, climate, and prosperous nature of the town.¹⁸ Black Mountain, almost from its beginning as a town in the late nineteenth century, served as a religious retreat center for visitors from all over the Southeast, and from almost all of the Christian denominations, due to its choice location, mountain atmosphere, and small town character. Montreat, a Presbyterian retreat center located north of the Black Mountain city limits, was founded in 1911.¹⁹ In addition to the larger religious retreat centers which were established in the first part of the twentieth century, Black Mountain was also home to a number of individual churches, few of which remain. As the number of residents and summer visitors grew, so did the need for new or expanded church facilities.

One of the earliest black families to locate in Black Mountain and one of the founding families of Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, were the Stepps, descendants of slave Myra Stepp, who was part Cherokee, and white slaveholder Joseph Stepp, of Black Mountain.²⁰ Children of Myra Stepp included Minnie, Margaret, Jack, Julia, Ann, John Myra, Mary Martha, Logan, and Ed. The men in the Stepp family worked in Black Mountain as farmers, carpenters, contractors, brick masons, grave diggers, loggers, and railroad workers. Many of the women were domestic workers, teachers, and health care workers. A view into the life of blacks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Black Mountain was written by Ed Stepp, who wrote several articles for the Black Mountain News which were published in 1945. These articles noted that many worked as farmers because that was often what they knew best from their former lives as slaves. After slaves were emancipated, they could buy their own land or were sometimes given land. They were often self-sufficient, growing their own food crops such as potatoes, corn, wheat, tobacco, apples, and grapes, and keeping a smokehouse for preserving meat from pigs, cows, and chickens that they also raised. John Myra Stepp, the older brother of Ed Stepp, recalled that his father, Joe Stepp, left land to his white sons but not to John Myra, motivating him to work hard to buy his own land to subdivide and sell for a profit. In addition to the food he grew on his farm for his family's use, John Myra grew enough to sell to the hotels in Black Mountain and Asheville. Education for his children was important to him and he served on the first school commission in Black Mountain to start up the first

¹⁶ Robinson, Susan. "Black Mountain Downtown Historic District", National Register nomination, June 2, 2004, pp. 8-25.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 8-27.

¹⁸ The History of Black Mountain. The Senior History Class of the Black Mountain High School, 1933, p. 34, and A Pictorial History of Black Mountain and the Swannanoa Valley. Black Mountain: The Black Mountain News and the Swannanoa Valley Museum, 2003, p. 47.

¹⁹ Bishir, Catherine W., Michael T. Southern and Jennifer F. Martin, A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 305.

²⁰ Interview with Pat Jones by Sybil H. Argintar, March 7, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 5

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

school for black children.²¹ Ed Stepp in particular worked with a crew of fourteen men to build streets in the town, unload train cars, dig basements, and install landscapes. He worked in the Church Street neighborhood in Black Mountain, which was under construction in the early twentieth century.²²

The Stepp family, along with members of the Daugherty, Davidson, Lytle, and Burnett families, were among the earliest members of Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, serving as its initial trustees.²³ All of these families can trace their ancestry back to slaves and the subsequent free black population that inhabited Black Mountain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The families were scattered throughout the community.²⁴ Mary Othello Burnette recalls the importance of her grandmother Mary Burnette Hayden in the Black Mountain community. She was well-known throughout Buncombe County for her work as a midwife and herbalist, trained by her mother Hanah Stepp who was a slave on the Joe Stepp plantation and served that community in the same capacity. Mary may have been the first African-American woman to be registered with the Buncombe County Health Department, for she often received sterile supplies from the county for her work.²⁵

For black families in Black Mountain and throughout the mountain communities, the church served as an important social institution, serving as "...a rock in a weary land for blacks..."²⁶ Before the emancipation of slaves, they could worship in separate areas of white churches. When blacks were freed, however, they began to build their own churches. To the black community, which held tightly together through the hard times of slavery, the Civil War, and later Reconstruction, the church was "...an extension of their home, more than a place of worship, it also served as a meeting place, a recreation facility, a comforter, and a nursery..."²⁷ Through the often challenging social and economic times of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the days of Jim Crow laws, segregation, and later integration, the neighborhood church in particular remained as an important focus which helped the black community maintain their heritage and culture. It served as not only the spiritual, but the social heart of the black community. In the late nineteenth century, there were over forty black churches in western North Carolina, some of which were sponsored initially by white churches of the same denomination.²⁸

²¹ Ibid. Pat Jones has a series of family notebooks she has compiled on the Stepp family history.

²² Ibid.

²³ Interview with Pat Jones by Sybil H. Argintar, March 7, 2008.

²⁴ Specific Ridgecrest families included James and Martha Stepp, Margaret Stepp, Hanah Stepp, Taylor Stepp, and Myra Stepp. In-town families included Robert and Ann Daugherty, Jack and Harriet Redman, and Richard and Margaret Littlefield. West side families included Mahala and Nelson Daugherty, Murphy Burgin, Thomas Lytle, William and Diana Lytle, Susanna Burgin, and Emily Lytle. North Fork families in 1880 were Squire and Mary Burnett, Hardy and Harriett Burnett, Lucy and Dawson Dillingham, and Lou and Thomas Gragg. In the Lake Eden area were Sarah and Christopher Stepp, Squire Rosana and Alexander Burnett, and John Fortune. Scattered in other areas of Black Mountain were the families of Ann McDaniel, Christopher and Chain Stepp, Washington Stepp, and Ann and Burg Copening.

²⁵ Burnette, Mary Othello. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 52.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 47.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 6

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

White supremacy began to take hold in the mountains, as it did elsewhere in the South, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Despite this challenge, however, black men from the mountains served in World War I. Soon after the War, many blacks began leaving the mountains for more lucrative jobs elsewhere, but others remained to provide much of the needed labor as the construction industry continued to boom.

The African-American community in Black Mountain, in the early decades of the twentieth century, was one where all the families knew and supported each other. While the church was often the focus of some aspects of social life, many activities were also held at home. These were called “entertainments”, including such events as taffy pulls, threshing time, harvest time, and sharing of musical talent. There were community dances with local black musicians performing, and often families would join together to listen to radio programs. With often little in the way of economic resources, the families managed by being resourceful, self-sufficient, supportive, and hard-working.²⁹

Historically, many neighborhoods in Black Mountain have been integrated communities, in keeping with the general acceptance of these families into the community in the years before formal integration. However, churches and schools were typically still segregated. There were stores owned by black families, and in the community centered on Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church there was also a Masonic lodge for the blacks.³⁰ Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church served as an important religious and social focus, filling a need for the black community in Black Mountain at the end of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth century.

Church History

Deed records note that the one acre of land and the first church building were donated in trust to the members of the black community in 1892 by Miles H. and Martha Stepp to James Daugherty, Ann Daugherty, and Emmaline Lytle, “Trustees of the Colored Church known as Tom’s Chapel”. Stated in this deed are stipulations that the land is to remain in use “...as a place of Divine worship for the use of the ministry and membership of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in America...”³¹ In July 1897, Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of the United States, and the Daugherty and Lytle trustees then passed the property on to Jonathan Watkins, Robert Daugherty, and Thomas Daugherty, “Trustees of Thomas Chapel in connection with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of the United States”, on July 6, 1897.³² This deed remained in trust within the church community until it was passed to the Original Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church Restoration Corporation from the Trustees of Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church on May 15, 2007.³³

²⁹ Burnette, Mary Othello. Interview with Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

³⁰ Interview with James Kennedy by Sybil H. Argintar, March 12, 2008.

³¹ Buncombe County Deed Book 102, p. 108. This notes the earlier deed transaction as May 14, 1892. The deed does not designate a specific person, only the community as a whole.

³² Ibid.

³³ Buncombe County Deeds, unrecorded, North Carolina Non-Warranty Deed.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 7

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

The first “Tom’s Chapel”, as it was called by some members of the community, was built sometime before 1892, but there is no clear documentation as to whether or not it was located on the same parcel of land as the current building. It was constructed of logs hauled from land in the Lytle Cove community of Black Mountain. It was named for Tom Pertiller and Thomas Daugherty, who were two of the founding fathers of the church.³⁴ However, most community residents who were members of the church in the 1920s and 1930s only remember it being called Thomas Chapel. So, while the pre-twentieth century first church building may have had the colloquial name of “Tom’s Chapel” it does not appear that the nominated building was ever called anything but Thomas Chapel. At the time the late nineteenth century first church building was constructed, it was the only black church in the Black Mountain community, used by both the Methodist and Baptist churches, on alternating Sundays.³⁵ Around 1910, Mills Chapel Baptist Church, a black church, was constructed, and the Baptists could then participate in services in their own building. However, many of the families continued to attend services at both churches.³⁶

It is unknown when the first building was torn down, or when the second building was constructed, but it appears that only the later buildings were located on the current parcel of land.³⁷ Little is known of what the second building looked like. The current building, the third Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, was constructed in 1922. While not fully documented, current church members recall that the builders were Ervin Kennedy, Thomas Lytle, and Ed Stepp.³⁸ Reverend W. R. Lovell was the pastor at the time this structure was built.³⁹ Lovell did not serve the congregation for very long after this, as it was common within the A.M.E. church that a new pastor would be sent from within the larger denomination approximately every two years. The membership also had the option to request a new pastor in less time than this if he was not a good match for the congregation.⁴⁰ Additional pastors which have served the church and their dates of service include Reverend Martin Carson (1927), Reverend John Williams (1930s), Reverend E. F. Lester (1950), Reverend Smith (1952), Reverend Brown (1953), Reverend J. F. Douglas (1954), Reverend Grady Lyons (1955-1956 and again in 1958), Reverend George Lipsey (1956 – 1957), and Reverend J. H. Hunt (1957).⁴¹

In addition to Sunday morning services, Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church had an active Sunday School program which was active as soon as the building was completed. Mills Chapel Baptist Church, located directly across the street, and Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church both participated in the

³⁴ Thomas Chapel church records. Early deeds to the current property note that the land was granted to “Trustees of the Colored Church known as Tom’s Chapel”.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jones, Dorothy. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, March 7, 2008.

³⁷ Buncombe County Deed Books 108, p. 112 and 102, p. 108. Also Jones, Pat. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, March 7, 2008.

³⁸ Kennedy, James. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, March 12, 2008.

³⁹ Building cornerstone and church record books.

⁴⁰ Wagner, Jean. Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church secretary. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, April 8, 2008.

⁴¹ Church record books and interview with Jean Wagner. Additional pastors who have served the church, but with exact dates of service not known, include Reverends Terry Young, Johnny McClure, Marcia White, Walter Bryon, Howard Dawkins, Robert Allen (two times), Mildred Twitty, George Patrick, Griffith, James Boyd, Waddell, Kenneth Loftis, Robert Robertson, Thompson, Cook, Mack Williams, Cliff Martin, Ramon, Hines, Banks, and Meeds.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 8

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

program. Sunday School met in the afternoons, and the typical program included an opening song followed by a reading, the Lord's Prayer, and a class which focused on a particular Bible verse or story.⁴² Church record books note that there was a church conference held at Thomas Chapel on December 12, 1927, with attendance from the twenty-four churches in the Blue Ridge District. This was an honor to be chosen as the site of the denominational conference.⁴³ Membership in the 1930s at Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church included Ed and Hattie Stepp, F. J. Moore, J. H. and Ella Summey, and the families of Lytle, Canady (later spelled Kennedy), Foster, Willson, Daugherty, Whitaker, Pertiller, Bowen, and Johnson.⁴⁴ In 1936, a group began to meet on a regular basis known as the V.C.E. Society. While it is not known what these initials stand for, it appears from the notes kept that this was a social issues study group, with topics including mob violence, the divine voice in nature, the golden rule, and including such topics as "What Shall I Do for A Living", and "How We Learned How to Use Our Minds".⁴⁵ The association of the black community with this group, along with other societies in Black Mountain such as the Masons, Scottish Rite, Eastern Star, and Odd Fellows was a continuation of the communities involvement in these benevolent organizations back to before slavery. These societies provided assistance for families in dire need of protection and financial help.⁴⁶

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church was the center of social as well as religious life in the black community. The church had no recreation hall, but the sanctuary often doubled as a social hall, including singing conventions featuring local vocalists and those from Black Mountain who competed with each other. Inspirational speakers were welcome, from the black community as well as those of other races. Plays were held in the church, including those which could not be held at the three-room Clearview Grammar School, which did not have an auditorium.⁴⁷ Religious skits and Christmas programs were also performed in the sanctuaries of Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church and Mills Chapel Baptist Church. Small gifts of fruits, nuts, and candies were exchanged, while at the same time providing the local black children with an opportunity to explore their talents in music and public speaking. It was a privilege to participate in these events, and all were well-attended by the close-knit families in the community. Funeral services were also held in the church, but most weddings, until the 1940s, were small family affairs held at home.⁴⁸

⁴² Church record books, August 1922 – August 1924. In August 1922, Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Summey were the teachers, along with Mrs. Annie Gragg and Mrs. Moore, each teaching a group, respectively, of ten and twelve students. Robert P. Foster was the superintendent of the school. During 1922, there were a total of twelve talks given, an average of twenty-five children attended, \$8.85 had been spent on literature, and \$10.00 was spent on a Christmas tree. The quarterly report in June 1923 noted that there was an average of eighteen students in attendance, with a top attendance of thirty-two. A total of \$3.49 had been raised. By 1923, Sunday School was being taught in the mornings before services. On August 17, 1924 it was noted that the children had taken up a collection towards the purchase of an organ.

⁴³ Church record books, December 12, 1927.

⁴⁴ Church record books, 1930s.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1936 and 1950s. It is not known at the present time what V.C.E. stands for.

⁴⁶ Burnette, Mary O. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

⁴⁷ It was not until Carver School was built in the late 1950s that an auditorium facility became available for the community. When Carver School was built, Clearview Grammar School, which was located just to the east of Carver School, was torn down. Information from Mary O. Burnette, in an interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

⁴⁸ Burnette, Mary O. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 9

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

Services continued to be held in the current church building until 1974, when work on a new building on West College Street in Black Mountain began. Services were held in the auditorium of the new church in 1981, and in the main sanctuary beginning in 1984. The old Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church building was rented out part of this time, and was left vacant part of the time, leading to deterioration of the building. The current owners, the Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church Restoration Corporation, with the generous donation of labor from contractor William Gillam, have begun a full restoration of the building in the past two years, which will then be used as a community center and museum.

Architecture Context

The Gothic Revival style, which was first popular from 1830-1860, continued as a popular style for church buildings into the twentieth century, as exemplified by this building. Typical elements of this style include the use of Gothic-arch windows, often in stained glass, steeply pitched roofs, and exterior walls built of brick, stucco, stone, or board and batten. Even though many churches in the early years of the twentieth century were built in the more popular classical revival styles, the Gothic Revival "...never lost its hold on church architecture..."⁴⁹ From the most grand urban church to the simplest small town and rural church, this style served the basic needs of many congregations. This style was so universal that "...the most stylized renditions of its elements, a pointed arch, a pointed headed door or window, a tower, became standard indicators of a church..."⁵⁰

The African American church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was no exception to this stylistic trend. Many slaves had attended the white churches of their masters and were familiar with the style. It was a logical choice, then, after emancipation, that the first freedmen's churches would be built in this style. While many of the white churches that they emulated were more elaborate, the black churches, especially those in small towns like Black Mountain, were most often simple wood-frame structures with minimal embellishment that reflected the modest resources of the community.

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church clearly exemplifies this trend, displaying allusions to the Gothic Revival through the use of basic forms and certain motifs. For example, in the six windows of the side walls, the use of a pointed upper sash with a "Y" muntin pattern recalling Gothic tracery was a less expensive alternative to the more high-style Gothic arch window. The basic form of the church, however, with a nave, entry vestibule, and bell tower, was typical of the style. The interior of the church is an open sanctuary with a well-finished angled wooden ceiling, dark stained pointed window surrounds, and plain white walls. The area for the minister's chair in the raised chancel area at the rear of the church is expressed on the exterior in a simple, rectangular apse, which also provided light to the interior. The church does not have an interior narthex, but rather a projecting vestibule that carries a bell tower above. The tower has simple pointed arch louvered vents just below the pyramidal roof cap, emphasizing the verticality of the tower and its vestibule base.

⁴⁹ Bishir, Catherine W. North Carolina Architecture. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990, p. 390.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

There are numerous examples of frame Gothic Revival-style church buildings in western North Carolina but only two such churches in Buncombe County were included in the countywide architectural survey. One of these is **Mills Chapel Baptist Church** (ca. 1910, now Bible Way Baptist Church), located across Cragmont Road to the southwest of the Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church property. This church originally served only the black community, but now houses a predominantly white congregation. Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church closely mimics Mills Chapel Baptist Church in its form and window design. (Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion's earlier building may have inspired the design of the 1922 church, but little is known of the earlier building's appearance.) Mills Chapel Baptist Church was moved to its current site from its original location on the east side of Fortune Street in the late 1950s and has been altered with the application of vinyl siding and construction of a large addition to the rear.⁵¹ In the Sandy Mush community in northwestern Buncombe County, **Paynes Chapel** (1889) is somewhat similar in form to Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, with a front-gable roof with returns, pyramidal-roof bell tower, weatherboard siding, and a center entry on the short end of the building, but it differs in the window style (four-over-four with pronounced lintels), the transom over the front door, and the decorative ornamentation in the gable end. Socially, it was part of a farming community and has no association with the black community.⁵² One of the churches most similar to Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion in terms of building form is the mid-nineteenth-century **Church of the Good Shepherd** in Tryon, Polk County, featuring a steep front-gable roof, separate entry vestibule, weatherboard siding, and lancet-arch windows. Moved to its current site in 1955 for the use of an African American Episcopal congregation, the church is believed to have been a slave chapel at Green River Plantation in Polk County.⁵³

⁵¹ Burnette, Mary O. Interview by Sybil H. Argintar, September 29, 2008.

⁵² *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*, p. 298.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 11

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10, Photos Page 12

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Buncombe County, North Carolina

Boundary Description

The boundary encompasses all of the land originally associated with the church and cemetery, as shown on the tax map. Buncombe County Pin 0609.12-75-5950.000

Boundary Justification

The current property is the land originally associated with the church and cemetery.

Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church photographs

The following information applies to all photographs, except where noted.

Name of property: Thomas Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church
Black Mountain
Buncombe County
North Carolina

Photographer: Sybil H. Argintar
Date of photos: March 2008

1. Front and east elevation, view northwest.
2. West elevation, view east.
3. North and east elevations, view southwest.
4. Typical window
5. Sanctuary, view north.
6. Sanctuary, view south.
7. Cemetery, view west.