

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Morrisville Christian Church

Morrisville, Wake County, WA0695, Listed 11/6/2012

Nomination by Rebecca Spanbauer

Photographs by Rebecca Spanbauer, August 2011



Overall view

Rear 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 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. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Morrisville Christian Church
other names/site number Morrisville Church of Christ

2. Location

street & number 222 Church Street not for publication
city or town Morrisville vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Wake code 183 zip code 27560

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

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

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 _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

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

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina, 1741-1941

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion - religious facility

Other – community center

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

foundation: brick

walls: weatherboard

roof: metal

other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Morrisville Christian Church is a one-story frame church that sits on a flat lot on the north end of Church Street in the town of Morrisville, in a predominantly residential area. The church was built in 1872-1873 as a vernacular front-gable church with a narrow rectangular form that is three bays wide and four bays deep. The church has a projecting front gable on the façade and the prominent three-stage bell tower located at the south corner, which contains the main entrance, protected by a front-gabled portico. It displays plain finishes including the weatherboard siding, most of which is original, original six-over-six windows, and a new 5V metal roof. Facing southwest, the church stands on an approximately quarter-acre lot that gently slopes downward towards the rear/northeast. In front of the church is an asphalt parking area, constructed in 2011, which replaces a gravel area that had historically been used for parking as well. The parking area is bordered on the northwest side by crape myrtle trees and on the south side by large, old-growth oak trees. A concrete sidewalk and ramp leads to the front of the church. Small shrubs line the foundation at the façade and at the front of the southeast elevation. The remainder of the lot is grass-covered with a small garden, created in 2011, with pavers and benches at the north/rear corner of the lot.

Narrative Description

EXTERIOR

The Morrisville Christian Church is a frame, weatherboard-sided front-gabled building with a modern 5V metal roof. Windows and doors are framed with flat board surrounds; corners are defined by rounded cornerboards. The façade, which faces southwest, has a lower, projecting, front-gable extension which houses a classroom and has two six-over-six windows. The church has a three-stage bell tower located on a projecting gabled bay on the south corner that has round, louvered vents on each side of the second stage. A cross-gabled belfry caps the tower. The front entrance is located on the south side of the façade, underneath the bell tower, and is sheltered by a front-gable portico supported by square, wooden replacement posts and a modern wooden balustrade on the northwest side of the portico. The portico floor features a concrete pad outlined in brick, constructed in 2011, which leads to a sloped sidewalk on the southeast side of the portico. The front entrance contains double-leaf, solid wood replacement doors topped by a single-pane transom of insulated glass. It is uncertain what type of doors and transom the original entrance contained, as these were removed and replaced with steel hollow-core doors in the 1970s.

The southeast elevation features three six-over-six windows and a modern entrance at the rear/north end. The window near the front lights the vestibule, which is inset from the nave of the church; the other two light the nave. The north entrance is accessed by a new concrete stoop outlined in brick, constructed in 2011, which replaces an older stair. A modern wooden balustrade runs along the stairs and the stoop. The entrance door is a solid wood replacement with four vertical panels.

The rear/northeast elevation has no windows or doors. Mechanical systems and electrical meter boxes are located along the foundation wall and a small wooden door pierces the center of the foundation wall to provide access to the crawlspace. Originally, a six-over-six window was located on the rear but it was removed in 2011 due to the installation of two interior bathrooms. The northwest side elevation has four six-over-six windows. The window closest to the façade was reused from the rear elevation, replacing one that was removed from this location in the 1970s.

The lot is gently sloped so that the grade falls as one approaches the rear of the building. The building, except the façade elevation, was once supported by brick piers; concrete-block curtain walls were installed

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between the piers in the 1970s. It now sits on a new brick foundation; the building was raised approximately one foot in 2011 in order to create a small crawlspace and get the façade wall off the ground, as it was originally built on-grade.

INTERIOR

The interior of the Morrisville Christian Church is remarkably intact. It contains its original wood flooring, wall and ceiling finishes, and floor plan; changes include new light fixtures, replacement doors throughout, and the insertion of bathrooms into former storage areas behind the chancel. The wall at the end of the nave that defines the chancel is original, or early, but the original plaster was removed and replaced with gypsum board. Molded caps top the door surrounds, features that were put in place during the 1970s renovation of the interior. The walls in the vestibule and nave are sheathed with horizontally-placed triple-beaded board and have a molded chair rail and wainscoting of vertically-placed triple-beaded board. The ceiling throughout the entire interior has flat tongue-and-groove boards; a hatch to access the bell tower is located above the vestibule. An open single doorway on the left/northwest side of the vestibule leads to the small, rectangular classroom at the front of the building. The classroom is sheathed with single-bead beaded board. The pull-chain for the bell tower is located in this room, in the rear/northeast corner closest to the vestibule, and is encased by a built-in cabinet.

A double door leads to the nave from the vestibule. The nave is lit by six windows, three on each side, framed with molded surrounds. Two large panels above two doorways on the northeast wall flank the three-sided chancel; these once contained burlap screens for a speaker system that was installed sometime in the 1940s or 1950s. These panels are outlined with flat painted boards and have a cruciform design inside. The ceiling in the nave is decorated by flat boards edged on each side with molding. These boards are placed to form one large rectangle down the center length of the nave; inside this rectangle is a large "X". The ceiling along each side of the center section has three squares each, formed by the same flat boards with molded edging. The cornice in the nave is defined by crown molding at the top, a molded board at the bottom, with approximately one foot of vertically-placed triple-beaded board in between. Quarter-round molding is found at the ceiling edges and in the corners of the room. The northeast wall of the nave is defined by gypsum board walls. Behind the wall are two large storage rooms, each of which is also sheathed with horizontal and vertical triple-beaded boards, similar to that in the nave. The northeast storage room contains a small kitchen. The northwest storage room is now a dressing room. Separate men's and women's bathrooms can be accessed from each of the storage areas and are located in the center rear of the building, behind the nave. All doors throughout the building are solid wood replacements with four vertical panels. The light fixtures are also replacement with early twentieth-century period globe lighting.

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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.)

Property is:

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1872 – 1873

Significant Dates

1872 - 1873

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the Morrisville Christian Church is 1872-1873, the date of the construction of the church.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) Morrisville Christian Church meets Criteria Consideration A since it derives its primary significance under Criterion C for its architecture as a remarkably intact frame vernacular church.

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Morrisville Christian Church, in Morrisville in Wake County, is of local significance under National Register Criterion C for architecture as a remarkably intact frame vernacular church. Built in 1872-1873, the church has a simple architectural character; the front-gabled form is seen commonly throughout the state, especially in rural settings. The three-stage bell tower with a cross-gable belfry and projecting gables are elaborations of this form. The church embodies the sense of respectability, refinement, and economy that small, rural congregations sought in the late nineteenth century. It also represents the growth and prosperity of small rural villages in Wake County that began to develop with the rise of the railroad in the years following the Civil War through World War I and improved access to building materials and design influences carried by the railroad.

Context 2, “Civil War, Reconstruction, and a Shift to Commercial Agriculture (1861-1885)”, pages E: 30-46) in *Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)* (Lally and Johnson, 1993) provides the context for the Morrisville Christian Church under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture. The church falls under Property Type 4A, “Institutional Buildings: Churches,” pages F: 142-147 and retains sufficient integrity of setting, design, and material, as stated in the registration requirements, pages F: 153-154. The period of significance for the church is 1872-1873, the date of construction of the church.

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

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The Morrisville Christian Church follows the tradition of most of Wake County’s historic churches: it was built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a simple, frame, gable-front building that is three bays wide and four bays deep.ⁱ It has a long, narrow form and has very little stylistic detail, except for the bell tower. Historically, the church had a divided-chancel floor plan: it had a long and narrow form with three sections of pews divided by two aisles and facing the chancel at the front of the nave.ⁱⁱ The pews have been removed and the interior of the nave is now open. Additionally, the building has one small classroom at the front of the building, separated from the main worship space by a wall with one doorway. The bell tower is the only concession to the more elaborate architectural detailing, which was popular in more affluent, urban areas at the time.

As the Christian denomination developed from Methodism, so did the Morrisville Christian Church adopt trends in architecture that Methodist congregations employed in rural North Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1860s, the Methodist church began disseminating architectural plans for churches. The goal of distributing these plans was to provide high-quality buildings to communities of all sizes. Many congregations throughout the country bought these plans and by the 1870s, specific elements of these plans were so ubiquitous that often rural churches could copy or interpret them without purchasing them.ⁱⁱⁱ These churches, especially in rural areas, were plain buildings with only small stylistic flourishes, with most acknowledging classicism or the Gothic Revival style.^{iv} Most churches also had elongated naves with divided-chancel floor plans, reflecting the influence of the Gothic Revival style popular in the last half of the nineteenth

ⁱ Lally and Johnson, page F 143.

ⁱⁱ Laura A.W. Phillips, *Legacy of Faith: Rural Methodist Churches in North Carolina*, Charlotte, NC: The Duke Endowment, 2010, xix.

ⁱⁱⁱ Phillips, xvi-xvii.

^{iv} Phillips, xv-xvi.

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century.^v It is unknown whether the Morrisville Christian Church congregation purchased a plan before they built their church, but members were certainly paying attention to national and regional trends, as their church shares the same simplicity,

Many rural Methodist churches in North Carolina were also incorporating classrooms in their churches. Before the Civil War, most rural churches of all denominations had very simple buildings, in which there was only one space to gather. After the Civil War, Methodist churches began building churches that included classrooms so that they could provide Sunday school and lectures, linchpins of Methodist religious instruction, in spaces that could be closed off from the main sanctuary. In this way, worship services and lectures could be held at the same time without disrupting each other.^{vi}

In North Carolina, a handful of other simple, frame vernacular churches built in the 1870s reflect the same vernacular tradition of the Morrisville Christian Church. Snow Creek United Methodist Church in Iredell County, Knox Chapel in Rowan County, and Cameron United Methodist Church in Moore County, all have long, narrow naves, and divided-chancel floor plans, with bell towers and/or floor plans being the only references to formal architectural styles.

Another church, the Oaky Grove Methodist Church in eastern Wake County, built in 1877, is a simple, frame Gothic Revival church that displays a front-gable form and pointed-arch windows and doors, and retains most of its original materials; it has a small steeple that replaced the original one that burned around the turn of the twentieth century. Though it is specifically Gothic Revival in style, with more features that display that style, it is a reference point for the Morrisville Christian Church in its elongated form.

The Morrisville Christian Church's significance arises from the fact that it still retains much of its original appearance, is one of the few frame churches left largely intact in the county, and is one of the few churches built by a small congregation that practiced independently of a larger denominational institution.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The town of Morrisville was established in 1852,^{vii} and had grown into a small, rural railroad village by the 1870s, with its core centered around the railroad tracks and depot. The Morrisville Baptist Church was built c. 1866. Typical of small railroad and farming towns across the state, Morrisville was home to farmers and merchants, as well as railroad and mill workers. During this period, the town boasted at least six general stores, a sawmill, four physicians, and a lawyer. By the late 1880s, the town had a handful of prominent houses and a few frame commercial buildings. Three of Morrisville's prominent farming and merchant families built large, fine I-houses with vernacular Queen Anne and Italianate sawnwork decoration. These houses include the Williamson Page House, the Page-Hamilton House, and the James M. Pugh House, all located in the center of Morrisville and built in the 1870s and 1880s. The North Carolina Railroad Company built several smaller, one-story, plain vernacular cottages that were home to workers' families. By the 1910s, a hosiery mill was established and several one-story mill cottages were built near the center of town.^{viii} The town's core retains the most prominent I-houses and several workers' cottages from the turn of the twentieth-century.

^v Phillips, xix.

^{vi} Phillips, xvii-xix.

^{vii} Kelly A. Lally, *The Historic Architecture of Wake County, North Carolina*, Raleigh, NC: Wake County Government, 1994, 322.

^{viii} Ruth Little, "Morrisville Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, located on file at the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, NC; Lally, 322.

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The Morrisville Christian Church was formed on September 8, 1872 by William Gaston Clements. Williamson W. Page sold the lot on which the church now stands to Clements on August 28, 1872. Clements established the church and formed a board of trustees soon after. Over the next year, members built the simple, frame building. The Morrisville Baptist Church and the Morrisville Christian Church stand as two of the earliest buildings in the town and represent that first period of significant growth after the Civil War.

William Gaston Clements, founder of the Morrisville Christian Church, was a farmer and self-educated preacher from the Morrisville area. He grew up on Clements Plantation, located near present-day Research Triangle Park. He fought in the Confederate Army during the Civil War and lost an arm during his military service. He was a devout Christian who founded several small rural churches in the area through his enthusiastic preaching and oratory skills. He was greatly involved in religious and education efforts throughout Wake, Durham, Chatham, Orange, and Alamance counties. He was President of the North Carolina, Virginia, and the Eastern North Carolina Christian Conference. He was a trustee of Elon College and superintendent of Wake County schools for thirteen years. The establishment of the Morrisville Christian Church came about after he had gained a following preaching out of several homes around Morrisville.^{ix}

The Morrisville Christian Church was part of a religious movement centered in Virginia and North Carolina that evolved from a rift in the Methodist denomination. The group was formed around 1792, when about thirty ministers, led by James O'Kelly of Chatham County, broke from the Methodist church over administrative disagreements. Originally known as the "Republican Methodists," the group later divided over the proper method of baptism. Those who supported infant baptism became known as "O'Kellyites" and those who supported full-immersion baptism as "Christians." The latter group operated primarily in the area of Wake County where Morrisville is located, through the nineteenth century.^x Clements founded the Morrisville Christian Church in this tradition and the church practiced full-immersion baptism through the time of its closing in the 1960s.^{xi}

After Clements' death in the 1920s, his son-in-law, Jack Green, began preaching. A regular weekly service was held every Sunday, as were Sunday school classes for adults and children, and revivals once a month. Church attendance peaked at roughly sixty people during the tenures of Clements and Green. In the late 1930s, the Christian church merged with the Congregational churches to form the Congregational Christian church, which itself later merged with the Evangelical and Reformed church to form the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the late 1940s or early 1950s.^{xii}

After the mergers, the Morrisville Christian Church (now known as Morrisville Church of Christ) shared a preacher with other congregations in the area and services began to be held only once a month. Preachers from United Church of Christ churches in Durham, Carrboro, Hillsborough, and Garner came to Morrisville. Services took up most of the day, including Bible school for adults and children in the morning, followed by the regular service, a potluck dinner, and then a revival in the afternoon.^{xiii}

During the 1960s, church attendance waned as Morrisville's population and economy contracted. Members decided to close the church due to low attendance and difficulties in finding a regular preacher; most went on to attend Morrisville Baptist Church, Apex Baptist Church, or the Community UCC in Raleigh.^{xiv} In

^{ix} Kelly A. Lally and Todd Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)," National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1993. Survey and Planning Branch, Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, NC Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, page E 43; Mrs. Tet Watson, interview with the author, September 13, 2011.

^x Lally and Johnson, page E 27.

^{xi} Watson, September 13, 2011

^{xii} Watson, September 13, 2011

^{xiii} Watson, September 13, 2011

^{xiv} Watson, September 13, 2011.

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February 1976, the trustees of the Morrisville Church of Christ sold the building to the Eastern North Carolina Association of the Southern Conference of the UCC.^{xv} In April 1976, the UCC quickly sold the building to the Town of Morrisville, who converted the church to town offices.^{xvi} The town used it for offices and town council meetings until the early 1990s, when a new town hall was built. The church sat vacant until 2010, when the town decided to restore the church and use it as a community center.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Bishir, Catherine W. and Michael T. Southern. *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Lally, Kelly A. *The Historic Architecture of Wake County, North Carolina*. Raleigh, NC: Wake County Government, 1994.

Lally, Kelly A. and Johnson, Todd. "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)." National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1993. Survey and Planning Branch, Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, NC Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, NC.

Little, Ruth. "Morrisville Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*. Located on file at the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, NC.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Phillips, Laura A.W. *Legacy of Faith: Rural Methodist Churches in North Carolina*. Charlotte, NC: The Duke Endowment, 2010

Wake County, NC. Deed records. North Carolina Department of Archives and History; Wake County Registrar of Deeds

Watson, Mrs. Tet. Interview with the author, September 13, 2011.

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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

^{xv} Wake County Register of Deeds, Book 2378, Page 452.
^{xvi} Wake County Register of Deeds, Book 2397, Page 136.

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.29
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17S</u> Zone	<u>696200</u> Easting	<u>3966700</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

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

The National Register boundary coincides with the legal bounds of parcel ID # 0755059211 and is shown on the accompanying tax map, at a scale of 1 inch = 25 feet, by a heavy line.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire parcel currently and historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rebecca O. Spanbauer
organization Cardinal Historic Preservation Services, LLC date October 12, 2011
street & number 600 Sampson Street Telephone 919-816-2895
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27609
e-mail rspanbauer@cardinalpres.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Property Owner:

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

name Town of Morrisville

street & number P.O. Box 166 Telephone 919-463-7110

city or town Morrisville state NC zip code 27560-0166

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 18 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.