

VLR-9/12/01 NRHP-2/11/02

**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 Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries
other names/site number VDHR file no, 81-5466

2. Location

street & number Cedar Hill Church Road (SR 675) and Kygers Hill Road (SR 677) N/A not a publication
city or town Lexington X vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Rockbridge code 163 zip code 24450

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 11/20/2001
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC 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.)

 Date
Signature of commenting or other official/Title
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
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet,
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other (explain):

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>2</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>2</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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
RELIGION	religious facility
FUNERARY	cemetery
DOMESTIC	secondary structure

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
RELIGION	religious facility
FUNERARY	cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Stone
walls	Wood
roof	Metal
other	Concrete
	Brick

Narrative Description

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

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.)

- X 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:

- X A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
X D a cemetery.
B a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past fifty years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

Period of Significance

Ca. 1874-1951

Significant Dates

1874

Ca. 1890

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property approximately 1 acre**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	17 629850	4177980	3	17
2	17 629090	4178030	4	17

... 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	<u>J. Daniel Pezzoni</u>	date	<u>June 27, 2001</u>
organization	<u>Landmark Preservation Associates</u>	telephone	<u>(540) 464-5315</u>
street & number	<u>6 Houston St.</u>	zip code	<u>24450</u>
city or town	<u>Lexington</u> state <u>VA</u>		

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	<u>Louise M. Mikell, Contact</u>		
street & number	<u>9203 Watson Rd.</u>	telephone	<u>(301) 565-0964</u>
city or town	<u>Silver Spring</u> state <u>MD</u>	zip code	<u>20910</u>

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 Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries
Rockbridge Co., Va.

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries occupy two separate parcels, each approximately a half acre in extent, in southwest Rockbridge County, Virginia. (Details about the discontinuous character of the parcels are discussed under the Boundary Justification heading of section 10.) The church and cemeteries stand on elevated ground overlooking the valley of Buffalo Creek, a tributary of the Maury and James rivers, near the former mill and post office community of Murat. Cedar Hill Church, built in 1874, is a one-story, nave-form log building (notching indeterminate) with weatherboard siding, a metal-sheathed gable roof, a stone and concrete foundation, and a one-room interior sheathed with plain and beaded boards. The church lot also includes two privies (one a reused tool shed of mortise-and-tenon frame construction moved from another location) and the old cemetery, used during the late nineteenth century and indicated by grave depressions and a number of uninscribed fieldstone markers. The new cemetery, established about 1890 and still in use, has grave and plot markers of fieldstone, concrete, marble and granite.

Inventory

1. Cedar Hill Church. 1874; early 20th c. Contributing building.
2. Old Cemetery. Late 19th c. Contributing site.
3. New Cemetery. Ca. 1890 and later. Contributing site.
4. Ladies' Privy. Ca. 1900; late 1960s. Noncontributing building.
5. Gents' Privy. 2nd quarter 20th c.; 1966. Noncontributing building.

Church

Cedar Hill Church is oriented with its gable end towards Cedar Hill Church Road (SR 675), which passes directly in front of it. The church is painted white with green trim. The foundation is constructed with tabular limestone stones on all sides except the east side, which is poured concrete. The concrete and most of the stonework appear to date to 1915; a stone pier attached to the crawlspace surface of the concrete wall may be a remnant of an earlier discontinuous stone foundation. A stove flue of handmade bricks laid in cement mortar that rises on the east side was repaired and possibly partially rebuilt in 1966. The front entry has a beaded batten door with butt hinges and porcelain door knobs. Over the front entrance hang a wooden cross and a varnished plywood sign giving the church name and June 1874 date of establishment (actually, the date of the deed for the church lot). The windows have beaded surrounds with wooden strips added to their out-facing surfaces when the church was weatherboarded (probably about 1900) and are

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Description (continued)

hung with batten shutters over six-over-six double-hung sash windows. A gap in the weatherboards on the rear gable end provides a glimpse of daubing between the logs and illegible penciled names and numbers on the daubing.

The interior has natural-finish vertical beaded matchboard walls, narrow tongue-and-groove floor boards over earlier floor boards, and a canted ceiling sheathed with plain flush boards painted white. The south end of the one-room space is occupied by a raised choir stand and pulpit dais with a beaded matchboard skirt and a curved balustrade with turned balusters and square-section end posts topped by modern wood candlesticks. To the left is a small beaded matchboard storage cabinet with a cyma cornice. The four windows have beaded surrounds (entry end pair) and surrounds fashioned from strips of beaded matchboard (pulpit end pair) with stained-glass-pattern translucent adhesive plastic over some window panes. A metal plate on the east wall has a circular hole for a stove pipe (the stove is gone). Two patched square openings in the ceiling boards formerly accepted stove pipes, and there is a plywood hatch for roof access at the entry end. Kerosene lamps with modern plate-like metal reflectors are attached to the walls (the church is not electrified or plumbed). In the crawl space are visible log joists with hewn tops and bottoms and with bark on some side surfaces, a continuous hewn sill on the east side, and a center wood foundation post.

The interior retains many historic furnishings. The oldest appears to be the pulpit, which has an original body constructed with cut nails and with lancet recesses and a molded base, and a later molded cap. The pews, which were built by area resident John Bolden in the mid-1910s, have ends with scrolled top trim and are constructed with brass nails. Most of the pews were given a cherry varnished finish in 1916; several retain traces of graining on their ends that may represent the original ca. 1914 finish. A white-painted "mourner's bench"--a pew with its top trim removed--stands in front of the pulpit. In the choir stand is a New York-made Kohler & Co. Upright Grand piano that was given to the church in 1966.

Church Site and Old Cemetery

A concrete pavement extends between the church and a gate in a white-painted board fence constructed in 1967. Against the fence to either side of the gate are benches from about the same period. A row of cedars lines the fence and there are larger cedars, perhaps nineteenth-century in date, at two of the corners of the lot. The side and back lot lines have wire fences. At the front west corner of the church rests a roughly cubic stone, painted blue-gray, that is believed to have once served as a mounting block.

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Description (continued)

The old cemetery occupies the back downhill side of the lot. About a half-dozen fieldstone gravemarkers are visible. Several of these are upright irregular tabular stones, and none are inscribed. Periwinkle and scattered yuccas are associated with the cemetery, and there are a number of depressions, aligned with the lot lines, that probably mark graves. The ladies' privy--which originally served as a tool shed and was moved to the site in the late 1960s--stands in the west back corner of the lot. It is a one-story weatherboarded building with a metal-sheathed gable roof, a single unglazed window with batten shutter, a batten door, and a modern corrugated-metal privacy screen in front. The privy has hewn sills, plates, and corner posts, mortise-and-tenoned and pegged together, with circular-sawn intermediate studs mortised into the plates and sills and circular-sawn braces and rafters. Only wire nails are visible, suggesting construction after about 1890. Inside are a toilet constructed of boards and a plywood vanity and dime-store mirror. The gents' privy is frame with corrugated-metal siding, roofing and privacy screen. It was built in 1966 out of lumber salvaged from a twentieth-century tool shed that formerly stood in the new cemetery.

New Cemetery

The new cemetery, established about 1890, occupies an oblong lot tapered at its west end. (The cemetery was referred to as the "New Graveyard" in 1916 church records.) Kygers Hill Road (SR 677) passes along the cemetery's north side and a historic farm lane that serves as the entrance drive to Short Hill Farm wraps around its west and south sides. A section of 1990s rail fencing built by William L. Harris encloses the lot near the driveway; other sides have wire fencing; and there is documentary evidence of nineteenth-century stone corner markers (not observed). A modern sign reading "Cedar Hill Cemetery/Est. 1874" stands near the gate. Just west of the lot is a large depression historically known as the Devil's Sink Hole and, along the sinkhole's north edge, a historic stone retaining wall that supports Kygers Hill Road.

The marked graves are grouped at the west end of the cemetery. The historic graves are interspersed through the western half with modern (post-1951) graves mostly clustered at the eastward front of expansion. There are approximately fifty gravemarkers, of which over half have pre-1951 dates or are fieldstones (of which there are about a half-dozen visible). The earliest death dates observed are those on the short blue marble obelisk of Emmett Houston Beal (1905-06) and Lewis Lawrence Beal (1907-08); this memorial may actually be "backdated," that is, erected later and inscribed with earlier death dates. Most of the early inscribed tombstones are of tabular marble form with segmental tops. Such a one marks the grave of early church leader Sandy Morrison (1853-1915). Simple floral carvings appear on some stones, and

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Description (continued)

inscriptions are conventional and have a religious theme; examples include "Blessed is he that dies in the Lord" and "May God bless these two little boys" (on the Emmett and Lewis Beal memorial). Historic plantings appear to be lacking. There are several notable grave plot markers. The Johnson family plot has poured-concrete corner markers with the cast initials JA on their tops. Another plot has a combination of fieldstone, concrete, and marble corner markers, the latter carved with the initial G. At both plots the corner markers rise well above grade, unlike the low-to-grade corner markers that are more typical of cemeteries of the era. Their form evokes the corner posts of traditional grave palings, of which one example is known to have once stood in the old cemetery.

Integrity Statement

Cedar Hill Church, its two cemeteries, and their setting retain good integrity. The integrity of the church may be regarded as excellent--its exterior and interior are virtually unchanged from the appearance they attained in the 1910s. The limited use of the church after 1927 and the good maintenance it has received are responsible for preserving its historic character. The old cemetery adjacent to the church was formerly marked with more fieldstone memorials than survive today. Most of these have been misplaced or may have sunk below grade (a common occurrence in historic cemeteries), but enough of the cemetery's historic character survives for it to be regarded as a contributing resource. The ladies' privy at the west end of the cemetery is interesting for its hewn mortise-and-tenon construction; however, because it did not gain an association with the property until the late 1960s, it is classified as noncontributing. The new cemetery has many more gravemarkers, of which over half are historic (pre-1952), and in a broad sense the modern markers perpetuate the basic form, material and scale of the memorials in use at the end of the period of significance. The setting of both parcels remains in its historic agricultural use with few modern intrusions. No modern buildings are visible from the church and old cemetery, and the few modern houses within view of the new cemetery are almost completely screened by foliage from Spring to Fall.

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NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries evoke the history of Rockbridge County's African American community. The small log church, which also served as a schoolhouse, was built in 1874 on a rocky hillside above Buffalo Creek, and it drew its original membership from the area's poor farming families. A cemetery was established behind the church, marked today by a scattering of fieldstone memorials, but because of the rocky ground and perhaps also the church lot's small size a new cemetery was laid out at a separate location about 1890. The new cemetery continues in use; its collection of fieldstone markers and later inscribed marble and granite markers chronicle the material betterment of the congregation during the early twentieth century. Likewise, the church was given weatherboard siding, a beaded matchboard interior, and other embellishments by 1920. As educational and job opportunities lured local blacks away from the countryside in the 1920s, activity at the church dwindled and services ceased entirely in the late 1930s, but the church is lovingly maintained by former members and descendants and is opened in August for an annual homecoming.

Applicable Criteria

The Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries meet Criterion A and are eligible in the black ethnic heritage area of significance for their association with the history of Rockbridge County's African American community. The period of significance extends from the date of construction of the church in 1874 and approximate period of establishment of the old cemetery about the same time and extends to 1951, embracing the years after use of the church became intermittent and then ceased but the new cemetery remained an active focus. The church and cemeteries are eligible at the local level of significance. Information in support of designation appears throughout the historic context. The discontinuous character of the nominated parcels is discussed under the Boundary Justification heading of section 10.

Acknowledgments

Many people assisted the preparation of this report. Foremost among these was the sponsor, the Cedar Hill Church congregation, represented by Louise M. Mikell and Preston Blakey Evans. Former members and others interviewed for the nomination included Lillie Beal (b. 1907), Preston Evans, William Leslie Harris, Louise Mikell, Edlow A. Morrison (b. 1918), Jennings J. Tardy, and Alexander B. Wood. Others who provided assistance included Tom Kastner and Henry Ravenhorst of the Ruth Anderson McCulloch Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and John Kern, Mike Pulice and Marc Wagner of the SHPO.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Historic Context

The Cedar Hill congregation appears to have formed shortly after the Civil War. African Americans working and living mostly on the white-owned farms in the Murat vicinity of Rockbridge County met for worship in a log dwelling that stands beside the "cress pond" on the Rader Farm to the southwest of the present church. Later the youthful congregation met under a large oak tree that formerly stood on the Kyger Farm approximately one and a half miles west of the present church. Cedar Hill's oak tree meeting-place was analogous to the brush arbor churches that many freedmen congregations established in Virginia following the war as temporary shelter until permanent buildings could be erected. Ida Morrison, the mother of nomination sponsor Louise Mikell, was told that early members of the congregation were buried near the tree. The present owner of the site, William L. Harris, recalls as a young man seeing logs under the tree that he believed to be bench seats. He was told by Buford Dixon, whose family owned the site in the nineteenth century, that the tree was referred to as the "Gospel Tree." The tree was destroyed by lightning about 1990, but its stump is still visible and a limb from it is kept at the present church as a historic memento.¹

The earliest known documentary evidence of the existence of the congregation is a June 20, 1874 deed by which farmer John Repogle (also spelled Repogle) transferred 63.5 square poles (approximately 0.4 acres) to Samuel Adams, Alexander Napper, and Andrew Johnston, "Trustees for the Colored Baptist Congregation." According to the deed, the congregation acquired the parcel "for the purpose of erecting a building upon it." This phrasing might be interpreted to mean that the present church had not been built by June 20, 1874, although an anonymous reminiscence inserted into the church records about 1920 states that Cedar Hill Church was built and dedicated in January 1874. According to one account, the "men of the congregation" built the 1874 church building. The names of the foreman and builders do not survive, but it is likely they included the original trustees and other early members such as Preston Evans (who was a blacksmith) and Sandy Morrison. Traditional log construction was typically a team effort, and many able-bodied rural Virginians of the era were familiar with the tools and techniques used to build in log, therefore it seems likely that the membership participated in the construction of

¹ Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" Moore, "Cedar Hill Baptist Church;" Mikell, "John Andrew Johnson;" Pezzoni, "Brush Arbors," 27; and Lillie Beal, William L. Harris, Louise Mikell and Edlow A. Morrison personal communication.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

its church.²

The 1874 deed contains provisions that were apparently inserted at the insistence of Repogle. There is no record of a cash transaction; instead the property was deeded to the trustees "in consideration of their good Conduct," and tradition states that the church site was a donation. The deed further stated that the building "shall be used exclusively as a place of Worship, a School House and a place of Publick speaking, and for no other purpose." Whether the church served as a school as early as 1874 is unknown, but it is known to have served as such from the late 1880s through 1905, after a nearby school known as the Sugar Camp School closed. Former church members do not personally recall or recall hearing of public speaking at the church, but a note in the church records for 1932 suggests the building was used by a lodge or club on at least one occasion.³

The 1874 deed describes the congregation as Baptist. However, some early members are known to have attended nearby Oxford Presbyterian Church during the nineteenth century, and church historian Alice M. Moore has noted that some of the church's doctrines were borrowed from the Presbyterians. John Repogle was a member of the Oxford congregation and Cedar Hill Church members Sandy Morrison (1853-1915) and John Andrew Johnson (1880-1954) were sextons at Oxford. Early church member Daniel Henry McDowell (b. 1843) is said to have attended Thomas J. Jackson's Presbyterian Sunday School for blacks in Lexington before the Civil War. By the late 1890s strong ties with local and regional Baptist organizations had developed. A church constitution was drafted in 1897 by Baptist minister S. S. Watts of Natural Bridge, and

² Rockbridge County Deed Book OO, p. 35; church records; Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" and Moore, "Cedar Hill Baptist Church." The 1883 Carmichael map of Rockbridge County does not show the church, but this may be an oversight. The 1874 church was not the first meeting house at the location. According to church historian Louise M. Mikell, "Mr. Repogle gave a cabin to the Congregation for a place of worship. The cabin was used until it was destroyed by fire some years later. The Congregation erected a new building from logs cut from the property and hewn to shape. This log cabin remains standing today." The earlier meeting house, which burned accidentally, was moved to the location and stood on the same site as the present building.

³ Rockbridge County Deed Book OO, p. 35; church records; Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" and Moore, "Cedar Hill Baptist Church."

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Statement of Significance (continued)

during the early twentieth century the church relied on Lexington's First Baptist Church to supply it with preachers. The church joined the (Berean) Valley Baptist Association by the mid-1890s, and Cedar Hill may have sent a representative to the Association's 1893 meeting in Marion.⁴

The early congregation drew its membership from families living within the Buffalo Magisterial District, located in the southwest section of Rockbridge County. Many of these families lived in dwellings on or scattered among white-owned farms, but a few joined together to form small black communities such as Needmore on Cedar Hill Church Road (SR 675) and a community known as Sally's Place on the Kyger (later Shorts) farm on Kygers Hill Road (SR 677) not far from the original meeting-place tree. The 1880 census indicates that most of the vicinity's black men in their teens or older worked as farm hands, whereas most women and teenage girls kept house, cooked or worked as washerwomen. A few church members had more specialized occupations. The aforementioned Preston Evans was a blacksmith, and Samuel Adams, who lived in a crude dwelling in the garden of the nearby Zollman property, was a wheelwright who also made baskets and buckets. (Unfortunately, little is known about the congregation's first minister, the Rev. Alexander Dixon.) An examination of census population schedules suggests that a sizable portion of the black population of the Buffalo District had family representation in the church and cemeteries. Statistical records for the years 1874 through 1876, copied into a later record book, note that the congregation grew rapidly from twenty members in January 1874 to between sixty and eighty members in 1875 and 1876.⁵

The cemetery that lies behind the church was presumably begun about the time the site came into use in the late 1860s or early 1870s. Older church members recall that most graves were marked by uninscribed fieldstones, and that at least one grave, that of a member of the Evans family,

⁴ Rockbridge County Deed Book OO, p. 35; Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" Mikell, "John Andrew Johnson;" Moore, "Cedar Hill Baptist Church;" church records; and Louise M. Mikell personal communication.

⁵ Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" Lillie Beal and Louise M. Mikell personal communication; church records; and U.S. census. The 1874-76 statistics give the "value of church edifice" in 1874 as \$85.00, \$150.00 in 1875, and \$250 in 1876. Assuming these figures are accurate, presumably they represent the total value of the church and furnishings, because there is no indication of an extensive early evolution of the building after its initial construction in 1874.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

had a wood paling around it. No inscribed tombstones are known to have been erected, and today only a handful of fieldstone gravemarkers are visible. According to former church member Edlow A. Morrison, "People put a stone [over a grave and] eventually the stone got moved away." The congregation did not consider its church-lot cemetery satisfactory on account of the rockiness of the ground, and it was abandoned for a new site about a half mile away on Kygers Hill Road.⁶

The restrictive size of the Cedar Hill church lot may also have been a consideration in the old cemetery's retirement about 1890. Like Cedar Hill, African American congregations established in rural Virginia after the Civil War often received their church sites as donations from white landowners. The sites were frequently too small to accommodate cemeteries, and so church members were either buried in family plots or in cemeteries established by the congregations but at separate locations. The practice of establishing discontinuous African American church cemeteries has been documented in Powhatan, Mathews, Greensville, Rappahannock, and Westmoreland counties.⁷

The new cemetery, a half acre in extent, was purchased by the church trustees from George D. and Medora C. Dixon in 1892 or shortly before, although a deed was not made until 1900. In August 1892 the Dixons sold an adjoining parcel and the deed referenced "the colored burying ground recently purchased by the trustees of the Cedar Hill Congregation." Former church member Lillie Beal recalls her father saying the first burial was of a member of the Gilmore

⁶ Lillie Beal, Louise M. Mikell, and Edlow A. Morrison personal communication; Moore, "History of the Cedar Hill Baptist Church." The rockiness of the Cedar Hill Church site, which would have rendered it poor farming ground, may have been a factor in its donation to the congregation, just as "old field schools" were often sited on exhausted farmland. An illustration of the site's poor growing conditions are two boxwoods, planted in the 1960s, that have not grown over two feet in height.

⁷ Hudson and Pezzoni, "Terre Haute Farm;" Martha Thomas and Louise M. Mikell personal communication; Hammond and Taylor, "Black Graveyards in Mathews County, Virginia," 1-2; Brown, *Historical and Biographical Sketches of Greensville County*, 232; Johnson and Johnson, *Rappahannock County*, 169, 178; and Norris, *Westmoreland County, Virginia*, 462, 471, 474. Church historian Louise M. Mikell believes the restrictive size of the old cemetery was a factor in its retirement (personal communication).

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Statement of Significance (continued)

family. The half-dozen or so identifiable fieldstone markers probably date to the first decades of the cemetery's use. Dates on professionally made and inscribed tombstones begin with the first decade of the twentieth century and increase during the 1910s. Although not ostentatious, these memorials suggest a rise in affluence of the church membership, perhaps a reflection of the nationwide agricultural prosperity of the World War I era.⁸

Cedar Hill Church, and its cemeteries, represented "the center for the Black Community" in the Buffalo District, in the words of local historian Louise M. Mikell. In addition to providing a focus for religious life the church doubled as a public schoolhouse. By the time Lillie Beal first attended school in 1917 (at age ten), Cedar Hill had been superceded by the Colliertown School, but she recalls that her older half brother and sisters attended Cedar Hill. (These children--Granville, Nannie and Lula--were born in 1882, 1886 and 1887 respectively, according to the 1900 census.) Cedar Hill teachers included Sarah Hoffman, Mrs. Isaac Roland, a Mrs. Burks (possibly the Francis O. Burks listed in the 1900 census), and Rice Lewis. Hoffman was a native of Lexington who attended Hampton Institute; she married successful Lexington physician Alfred William Pleasants in 1908. Rice Lewis worked as a mail carrier in addition to teaching. Lillie Beal recalls that a "mischievous boy" in Lewis's class "would pick the daubing out of the wall and throw it" at the head of his instructor.⁹

In the 1910s, about the time professionally made tombstones began to appear in the new cemetery, the congregation decided to improve the appearance of its church. Lumber was purchased in 1913 to refloor the interior and to make pews, the latter fabricated by local resident John Bolden possibly out of oak logs cut by members of the congregation and sawn by a Mr.

⁸ Rockbridge County Deed Book 78, p. 223, and Deed Book 89, p. 38; Lillie Beal personal communication. Several African American individuals with the surname Gilmore died in the Buffalo District during the late 1880s and early 1890s; any one of them may have been the first interment (Morris and Blimes, *Rockbridge County Virginia Death Records, 1871-1896*, 77). There is a possibility that some of the tombstones with dates from the period 1900 to 1920 were actually erected later and "backdated," but the form and style of the markers suggest that they were in fact erected during the general period of their dates. The trustees at the time of the 1900 deed included Lee and Thomas N. Beal, Sandy Morrison, J. E. Boss, and Hasten Gary.

⁹ Lillie Beal personal communication; Louise Mikell, "John Andrew Johnson;" Henderson, "Alfred William Pleasants;" and U.S. census.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Mackey. The church was painted white in 1913, and the tradition of green trim color may have been established at that time or during an earlier painting. Lillie Beal recalls that the new floor and choir stand were constructed by white carpenters, possibly brothers, who lived on nearby Plank Road. The church was underpinned with stone and concrete in 1913-14, and the beaded matchboard interior was probably added during the same period (perhaps to conceal the damage done by daubing-throwing school children). Crowning the improvements was the purchase of a used organ from Manly Baptist Church in Lexington in 1917.¹⁰

In an interview for the nomination, Lillie Beal (b. 1907) recalled many aspects of life that centered on the church during the 1910s and 1920s. Services began at nine o'clock in the morning with Sunday School and concluded with preaching, usually by a guest preacher from one of the county's larger Baptist congregations but sometimes by a member of the Cedar Hill congregation. Drinking water was transported by wagon from the Dixon Spring. Church picnics were a highlight of Lillie's girlhood. "That was our greatest day, going to the picnic," she recalls, and chicken, slaw, and pickles were among her favorite picnic foods. In the early 1910s the church staged a hayride. Lillie's grandfather Sandy Morrison loaned a horse and wagon and the adults and children rode to Sulphur Spring, a place of resort located in the county's Natural Bridge District.¹¹

Former member Edlow Morrison (b. 1918) recalls Christmas Eve services at the church when he was a boy. Older church members presented the children with gifts such as nuts, candy, and trinkets, and Morrison still has a small cedar chest he received. Church minutes for December 24, 1926 indicate that Edlow Morrison and other children gave recitations before the assembled congregation, although Morrison does not recall the topic of his talk. In addition to worship services, church records for the quarter century after 1905 (the first year for which regular records survive) list the many "ice cream suppers" and "rallies" that served as fundraising events, and in the 1920s a chapter of the Baptist Young Peoples Union met at Cedar Hill. An anonymous

¹⁰ Church records; Mikell, "Cedar Hill Colored Congregation;" and Lillie Beal and Louise M. Mikell personal communication. The organ was sold in the late 1960s.

¹¹ Lillie Beal personal communication. Upon his death several years later in 1915, Sandy Morrison was described by a correspondent (presumably white) to the *Lexington Gazette* as "one of our most esteemed colored citizens" (May 12, 1915 issue). Picnics were held across the road from the church.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

history in the church records describes typical church attire: big hats for the ladies; washed farm clothes, "Sunday go [to] meeting suit[s]," and sometimes "tails and tucks" for the men; and the children "fresh and starched."¹²

In the late 1920s the congregation lost some of its key families, those who Lillie Beal says "kept the Sunday School and church going." Most moved to Lexington where there were more opportunities for work and education. In fact, a black school serving the Buffalo District closed in 1927 and Lylburn Downing School opened in Lexington the same year, and Edlow Morrison says this was the principal reason for his family's move to Lexington. Morrison recalls occasionally attending services at the church between 1927 and 1930, and church records indicate sporadic use through 1938 and a homecoming in 1939. Afterwards the building sat essentially idle for twenty-six years, although former member Alice M. Moore occasionally brought her preschool class to the church for Christmas sings.¹³

In 1965 an annual homecoming was established, meeting at the church the third Sunday in August. Repairs were made to the church and grounds including the repair or rebuilding of the stove flue (by Leroy Richardson), the addition of privies, and the construction of the fence across the front of the lot. The ca. 1900 ladies' privy originally served as a tool shed on the McCorkle Farm near Oxford Church and was moved to Cedar Hill in the late 1960s by Edlow Morrison and others. The mens' privy was built in 1966 out of lumber salvaged from a tool shed that once stood near the gate of the new cemetery. Today Cedar Hill Church is acknowledged as an important site illustrating the African American heritage of rural Rockbridge County, and it is being considered as a Summer 2001 meeting site for the Historic Lexington Foundation.¹⁴

¹² Edlow A. Morrison personal communication; church records; and Anonymous, "Out of the Past."

¹³ Lillie Beal, Louise M. Mikell and Edlow A. Morrison personal communication; church records.

¹⁴ Louise M. Mikell, Edlow A. Morrison, and William L. Harris personal communication; church records.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The two discontinuous nominated parcels are depicted on the 1:200-scale map that accompanies this nomination.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the two discontinuous nominated parcels correspond to the historic and present property lines of the church and cemeteries. The discontinuous character of the parcels reflects both the particular historic evolution of Cedar Hill Church and its cemeteries, and also, possibly, the common practice of historic African American congregations in rural Virginia of establishing separate churches and cemeteries. The church and old cemetery parcel lies 0.45 miles east of the new cemetery parcel, separated by a wooded ravine and cleared ridge. The setting of the parcels and the intervening land retains the rural character it possessed during the period of significance, although there is presumably a greater ratio of wooded land to cleared due to the region-wide reforestation of the late twentieth century. Two dwellings have been constructed (since 1978) just south of an imaginary line that connects the center points of the two parcels. The parcels are indirectly connected by a road system that had come into existence by the mid-1880s. The parcels are not visible from each other.

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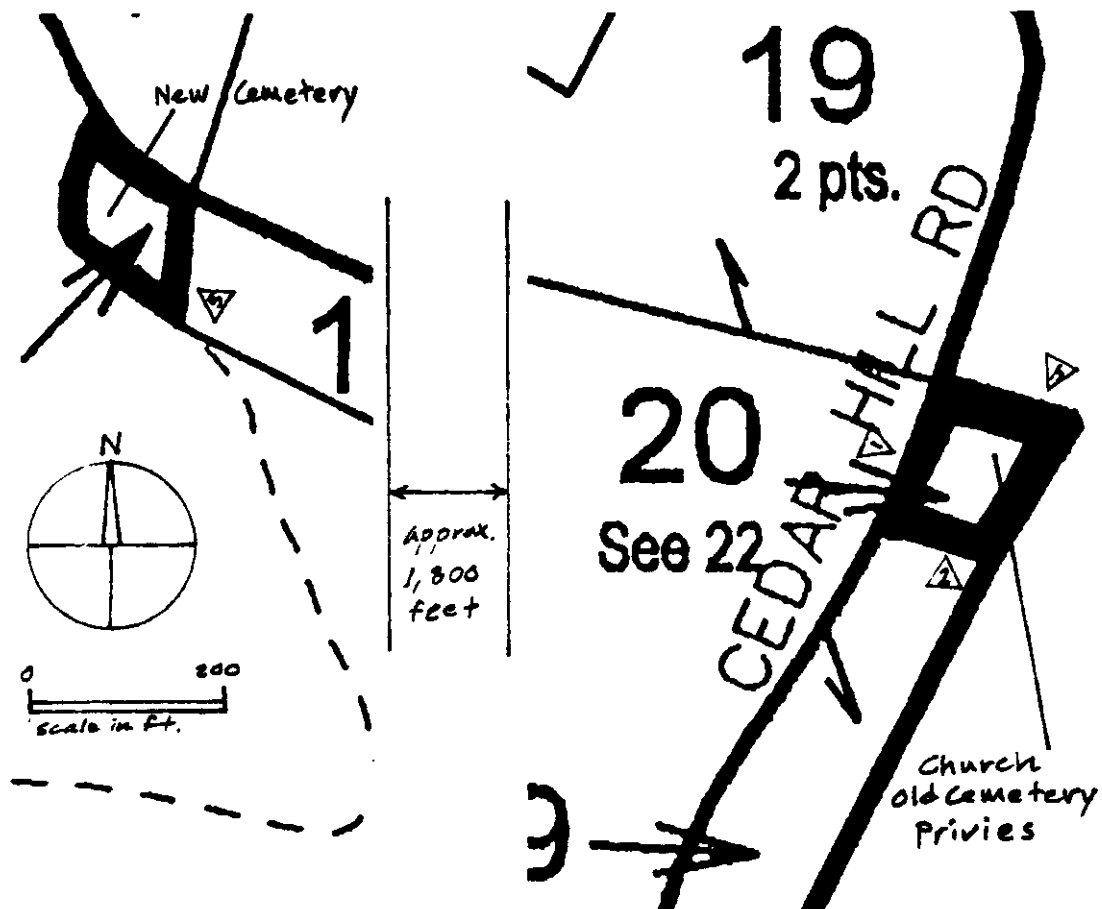


Exhibit A: Cedar Hill Church and Cemeteries nominated parcels. Scale: 1 inch equals approx. 200 feet. Number and direction of view of exterior photographs indicated by triangular markers. Exhibit adapted from Rockbridge County Section Map 86.

NATURAL BRIDGE QUADRANGLE
VIRGINIA—ROCKBRIDGE CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5159 14 SW
(LEXINGTON)

15 MI. TO U.S. 60
COLLIERSTOWN 4 MI.
1:700 000 FEET

30

31

LEXINGTON 4.5 MI. 79° 30'

37° 45'



Cedar Hill Church &
Cemeteries, Rockbridge
Co., Va. (UTM ref s zone 17
1. church & old cemetery
E629850 N4177980
2. new cemetery
E629090 N4178030

178

177

510 000
FEET

176

175

42° 30'

174

336