Preservation, Public History, and the Rural African American Church: Emery Methodist Church, Rutherford County, Tennessee, 1869 – Present

By

Alexis Matrone

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Thesis Committee

Dr. Carroll Van West, Chair

Dr. Aaron Treadwell

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ABSTRACT

For so long Historic Preservation has widely centered its efforts around large and beautiful architecture, homes of well-known individuals within American history, and historic districts. This project aims to widen the boundaries of preservation efforts while simultaneously highlighting the rich African American history within Rutherford County, Tennessee, during the Reconstruction era and beyond.

Reconstruction was a vital time for the development of African American communities. At the center was the church, but unfortunately, many of these church buildings, and eventually histories, are lost to the times of suburban sprawl and gentrification. This project works to provide the history of Emery United Methodist Church, its congregants, and the surrounding community and work towards protecting the church building and historic documents. This study provides to the overall history of Rutherford County during the years of Reconstruction and provides an understanding of the importance of African American communities and the role that Public Historians and Historic Preservationists can play in working towards their protection and survival.

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Chapter 1: The Black Church, Community, and Identity

Emerging out of the American Civil War, the United States faced a long and turbulent process of healing. From the families that lost loved ones to the land destroyed by bullets and blood, a significant change was underway across the American landscape. With the conclusion of the war came the end of slavery and the need for the emancipated freed people to begin building new and free lives and building their own communities. Emery Community which housed Emery United Methodist Church, is one of these post-emancipation African American communities.

Black-dominated churches hold deep history within the rural areas of the South, providing a center for small black communities made up almost entirely of formerly enslaved people. Emery United Methodist Church sits on the border of Murfreesboro city lines today, but in 1869 the church sat in the rural lands of Rutherford County. Through the years, Emery United Methodist Church gave to its community by ways of religious practice, education, and a lasting home to a congregation of descendants. Although the church did not make the split into the African Methodist Episcopal Church, research will identify the rich black history surrounding the church and the lasting home of worship Emery Church was for the surrounding African American community. Emery Church now sits on a corner of a growing upper middle-class neighborhood, facing a time of immense suburban growth and gentrification of the once rural landscape. This project moves to preserve the history of Emery United Methodist Church by highlighting the importance of the church and the role its patrons played within the African American

community to better ensure the protection of the church and to sustain its long-lasting legacy.

Michael A. Gomez explains in his work *Exchanging our Country Marks* that the determination of enslaved men and women to formulate who they were in response to the circumstances of their enslavement largely defined their sense of identity.[1] Gaining freedom after emancipation, a more developed sense of self and community, free of the shackles of slavery, could begin. For so long, the owners of these men and women had chained and forcibly taken the history, language, culture, and individualism from the enslaved. It was now time to rebuild, and for many, the first steps began in the church. As freed people established their own communities, the church house was the central location. The single building was often a religious center, school, lodge, and community gathering spot. The church, as William Montgomery emphasized, became a place to implement personal and racial uplifting.[2]

Churches within the newly formed freed communities provided the sanctuary for African Americans to find a path of life without ownership or abuse. From these churches, free thought flowed, and progressive minds flourished, giving way to African American voices heard on political, social, and cultural platforms. The development of black churches within freed communities solidified the growth and survival of African Americans in the South during the harsh eras of Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and Civil

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[1] Michael A. Gomez, *The Transformation of African American Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 219.

[2] William A. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 148.

Rights.[3] Still, like people and communities, each church formed its own identity. Through a scholarly review, this chapter emphasizes the rich history of black churches in the American South but also navigates through scholarly debate over the created identities of black church and religion.

Religion and the Enslaved

To begin to understand the development of the black church, one must first go back to understand black religion. Unwillingly brought onto American land and forced into chains, Africans and their descendants constantly heard from their owners of their lack of culture, knowledge, and faith. Many owners chose to "Christianize" the enslaved they owned, sometimes out of a sense of obligation but most often from the assumption that Christian faith would enable the enslaved to better accept their fate. However, African Americans gradually formed a relationship with the Christian religion that was different than that of white people.

Melville J. Herskovits's work *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), Herskovits asserts that African culture was not erased by Europeans but "reinterpreted" with "European culture being translated into African value and behavior systems."[4] By recognizing African retentions, Herskovits evaluated cultural differences and similarities scientifically, in a manner detached from racist terms and beliefs. More than thirty years

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[3] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990). Chapter 8 deals heavily with the intersectionality of church and political and Civil Rights for blacks.

[4] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 51.

later, E. Franklin Frazier published his work *The Negro Church in America* (1974), disagreeing with Herskovits. Frazier argued that the institution of slavery stripped away what little culture Africans may have once had. In 1978 both arguments would be used by the historian Albert J. Raboteau in a career spent addressing the myth that people of West Africa lived “backward” non-Christian lives and did not have culture before the arrival of Europeans and their Christian religion.

Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (1978), written by Albert J. Raboteau, explored the African diaspora and how religion traveled to the Americas from Africa, as well as the ways in which enslaved people practiced their religion in the places where their masters could not see or find, places that for Raboteau defined the "invisible institution.” Raboteau argues that Communities and tribes of the West African peoples flourished with cultural traditions, influence, and connection to God or Gods and emphasizes African faith by bringing forward evidence of African religious objects, beliefs, and statements that signify a connection to higher powers. While it becomes apparent that several forms and practices of African religion existed before the arrival of Europeans and the slave trade, the question becomes, did African culture survive the African diaspora?

Raboteau considered both Frazier’s and Herskovits’s arguments that explore the movement or the lack of movement of African religious ways across the Atlantic and the influence of traditions still practiced in black churches today. Falling in the middle of both ideas, Raboteau explained that for the progression and understanding of black history and culture. Raboteau concludes that open eyes and an open mind are needed to

evaluate both sides of each argument. Raboteau explained that the roots of African American religion:

> "is not an argument with a winner or a loser, for using differing perspectives, both are right. Herskovits was right by demolishing the myth of the Negro past – He did succeed in demonstrating that elements of African culture survived slavery in the United States. Frazier was also right – in posing the question of African survivals in terms of significance or meaning and in keeping sight of the real differences between Afro-American cultures in the United States and elsewhere."[5]

Raboteau concluded that the remains of African culture are reflected in the mingling of religious traditions in black worship even today. Raboteau deepened the understanding of religious life and progression among the enslaved and deepened the scholar's conversation of the myths and facts of black history and black religion.

A year after, Raboteau's survey, Mechal Sobel's *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro Baptist Faith* (1979) provided a detailed case study of enslaved religion. Sobel asserted that the enslaved maintained an African worldview, although altered, which shaped their acceptance of the Christian religion. Sobel divides her work into two sections. First, she explored the retention of African culture and ideas and the translation into American slave life. Next, she focused on the development and growth of the black Baptist church. Sobel's evidence disproves that widespread slavery eradicated African culture. By mapping the regions in Africa where most enslaved people were taken, Sobel argued that the closeness of tribes as well as the kinship groups amongst plantations kept aspects of African culture alive. Sobel's arguments on the survival of African world views also blend with the belief that black religion and church form their own identity in

[5] Raboteau, *Slave Religion,* 86.

part due to the remaining African influence. Sobel admitted there is much European influence among black religious beliefs and practices but emphasized that Africans chose these beliefs and tales out of the context of the African sacred cosmos that continued to play a crucial role, though hidden role." [6] Mechal Sobel understood that it was impossible to say that African culture was able to survive through the traumatic journey into slavery entirely, aspects of the culture remained throughout the years of transition, giving way for the emergence of an "American" style of black religion and church.

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (1990) took the early scholarship and then created a larger platform for scholarly analysis through a careful, thoughtful analysis of the roots, expansion, and impact of the Black church on, first, African American communities, and second, on American history as a whole.[7] In the words of Lincoln and Mamiya, in order for a church to be black, it must follow a particular criteria.[8] To be a black church, it must be a part of a black-controlled denomination and satisfy the need of the black community. While these markers are crucial to maintaining the identity of black churches, not all churches maintained these criteria through the difficult years, but that is not to say the history of the church does not remain black.

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[6] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro Baptist Faith* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 71.

[7] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

[8] Ibid.

Historian Gayraud S. Wilmore took the Raboteau and Sobel model in his work *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (1998) and found that primary sources and lasting evidence are sparse on either side of the arguments where the ideological leanings are all too apparent:

> There is as much evidence that certain retentions from Africa persisted in African-American religion in the South as there is that the slaves collapsed before the juggernaut of evangelism and were revived in the pure white garments of Euro-American Christianity. [9]

Wilmore's argument defending the retention of African influence within religion among the enslaved in America is a relatively small section of a much more powerful work. Wilmore discusses the use of religion as weaponry the enslaved used to gain their freedom.

The Church

While it was common for enslaved to worship in secret, it was not uncommon for the enslaved to watch and receive service within churches as whites did. They entered separately, sat separate, and at times had worshipped separately. While the churches remained racially separate, many enslaved began faithfully following many forms of the Christian religion. In her book, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (1999), Janet Duitsman Cornelius delves into the extent to which enslaved adopted Christianity in the South and how blacks transformed the religion into their own by incorporating African ritual and practice.[10] Using firsthand accounts, Cornelius examines

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[9] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd ed (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 48-49.

[10] Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

enslaved people's involvement with the Methodist Church. Cornelius states that blacks joined the Methodists after the 1770s with the idea that "Methodist theology, like Christian teachings, did not draw invidious distinctions between whites and blacks. Methodists held that God was no respecter of man's earthly condition and that he loved the poor and the despised as much as the rich and the privileged."[11]

Cornelius also evaluated the racial culture within the church as black attendance began to rise. Separation and discipline within southern churches most often reflected similar divisions on the plantation. Surveying a variety of church buildings, Cornelius found key similarities:

> Using galleries as boundaries evolved from English church custom, which had separated poor worshipers from those who paid pew rent, placing the poor furthest from the pulpit either in the rear of the church or in galleries. At St. James Church on Goose Creek, South Carolina, slaves worshiped in a gallery originally designed for parishioners unable to afford pews. Hopewell Church, near Marion, South Carolina, typically separated blacks from whites in the same way.[12]

The separation and treatment of blacks within the church, with emancipation, led to racial and political strife within congregations and eventually would lead to a complete split of the Methodist church itself, as the enslaved and free blacks left to form such congregations as African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1817 and Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870.

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[11] Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South*, 48.

[12] Cornelius, *Slaves Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South*, 36-37.

Richard Allen commonly referred to as the father of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, along with Absalom Jones, walked into St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church on a Sunday morning in 1787. Gathering a group of black Christians, Allen and Jones began praying in a restricted area. As soon as white ministers dragged one of the men praying, the remaining group of blacks gathered their items and walked out of the church. Throughout the following decades, Allen and other African American Methodists worked tirelessly to create a church that would serve as a place for equal worship as well as build a platform for blacks to fight racial inequality. The African Methodist Episcopal church officially cut ties with the majority white Methodist Episcopal Church in 1817. That same year the new church published its Doctrines and Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was published detailing the internal structuring of the A.M.E. Church.[13] There remained significant commonalities with the M.E.C., but the last section of the Doctrine highlights the difference.

> SECTION V.: Of Slavery.
> Quest. WHAT shall be done for the extermination of slavery?
> Answer. We will not receive any person into our society, as a member, who is a slave-holder; and any who are now members, that have slaves, and refuse to emancipate them after notification being given by the preacher having the charge, shall be excluded.[14]

Other areas of the document clearly state the reasoning behind the division of the church and their intention to use the newly founded African Methodist Episcopal Church

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[13] Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Richard Allen, the A.M.E. Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 161-162

[14] African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: J. H. Cunningham, 1817), 101.

as an area for progression in racial equality. In 2020 Hannah Wakefield agreed that the narrative reads more like a declaration of independence than the start of a guidebook to the church policies and practices.[15] She noted the connection between American political liberty and African religious liberty using the grievances committed by the Methodist Episcopal Church:

> White elders and preachers threatened to expel black Christians from the M.E.C., they threatened to take away their new building, they put regulations in place to curtail black autonomy. And white ministers who preached at the black church demanded hefty fees for their work yet undersupplied the pulpit.[16]

As the power of the A.M.E. church continued to grow in the nineteenth century, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner became one of the most significant African American leaders and a force for the church's expansion, as detailed in his biography by Stephen Ward Angell.[17] Angell reviewed the story of Turner's journey into the A.M.E. church, beginning with his time in Georgia. During Turner's time as a free black in Georgia, when he witnessed the independent Baptist churches led mainly by black preachers with little oversight or enforcement, even though state law ordered the white supervision of black churches. Witnessing this small amount of religious freedom, Turner understood the dangers and appalling limits of slavery on

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[15] Hannah Wakefield, "Richard Allen and Black Church Disciplines*," Resources for American Literary Study* 42, no. 2 (2020): 198.

[16] Ibid, 199.

[17] Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and Africa-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

black churches stating, "you could not preach the gospel, or anyone else. God's word had to be frittered, smeared, and smattered to please the politics of slavery."[18] Ministers could not push the narrative as far as it must to gain freedom, from this notion, Turner joined the African Methodist Episcopal church in 1858 and quickly became a leading member, appointed as the first black chaplain in the United States Colored Troops.

Turner pushed for the growth of the church with the idea that educating black ministers would ensure the progression of independence for blacks against white influence. Southern white Methodists wanted an educated clergy as long as they fully controlled the education but unwilling to give up that control to independent black denominations with emancipation. Turner remained determined that the A.M.E. should not be subordinate to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Using recruitment, a widespread building of churches, and a strong connection to religious discipline, Turner continued to seek growth and racial independence for the church and its members. Using his platform within the church to enter into politics, Turner was elected to the Georgia state legislative in 1868. Later in 1880, he became the first Southern Bishop at the A.M.E. Church. He was outspoken on many racial issues. In 1883, for example, after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, Turner labeled this decision as a "farce," stating "it was not the states that emancipated the slaves rather the United States and called upon blacks to enlist in the armed forces. After the United States

[18] Ibid, 20.

accomplished all those things, it was ridiculous for the white people of the respective states to decide whether we shall be treated as people or as dogs." [19]

As well as his biography of Bishop Turner, Angell provided insight into the Antebellum and post-war Southern churches, along with the change in racial issues after the war. The biographical timeline on Bishop Turner simultaneously traced the changes within the A.M.E. church through the years directly following the war. By relating these timelines, Angell demonstrated ways in which the black church and its members found a new way of life for blacks fighting to elevate the race to a position of equality.

Politics and Liberation

For many African Americans, the church was a place of safety, self-worth, and enrichment, while for others, it was a place for reaching change, as became evident through the leadership of Black ministers in the Civil Rights movement of the twentieth century, In 1970 James H. Cone, a religious philosopher, compares black theology to the black experience throughout his seminal work *A Black Theology of Liberation*. For Cone, ministers understood that Christ was the tool that would liberate blacks from the oppression they have endured so for long. He observed:

> To preach the gospel today means confronting the world with the reality of Christian freedom. It means telling blacks that their slavery has come to an end and telling whites to let go of the chains. Blacks do not have to live according to white rules. If the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation, "then blacks have a higher loyalty to God that cuts across every sphere of human existence. [20]

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[19] Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South*, 168.

[20] James H Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 50th Anniversary Ed., (New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 139.

Using religion and, more specifically, black theology, Cone highlighted that similar to the liberation of Israelites in Egypt, blacks' connection to God is stronger because of the adversity faced through the many years of slavery, Jim Crow, and beyond. By providing an in-depth and thorough explanation of black theology Cone then analyzed the role of the black church, explaining that "the church not only proclaims the good news of freedom, it actively shares in the liberation struggle."[21] Cone believed that the black church and black theology went hand-in-hand:

> The church as a fellowship is a visible manifestation that the gospel is reality. If the church is not free, if it is a distorted representation of the irruption of God's kingdom, if it lives according to the old order, then no one will believe its message – to believe is to live accordingly; the church must live according to its preaching.[22]

Cone was not the first nor the last to speak on black theology in relation to black liberation. Almost thirty years later, Gayraud Wilmore turned to Cone's theories because they had taken the African American experience seriously, including the search for black economic and political power.[23] Wilmore delved deeper into Cone's argument, highlighting the lack of understanding white Christians have on what it means to be black, relating the "blackness" to only mean skin color. Wilmore re-emphasized Cone's words:

> Being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your minds, and your body are where the dispossessed are… Therefore, being reconciled to God does not mean that

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[21] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 139.

[22] Ibid, 139-140.

[23] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 246.

> one's skin is physically black. It essentially depends on the color of your heart, soul, and mind. [24]

Cone and Wilmore put forth a crucial argument, the identity of black church compared to white church is extremely different, for the difference is not necessarily related to color, it is related to experience. God's word was never used to strike down and control whites in America, it was a place of sanctuary and class, while black's experience in America changed that relationship with God and the church dramatically. Black theology and church were a way for blacks to gain a level of equality that was not visible in the world around them. Still, it was evident through the word of God, and African Americans used that word to propel their voice when speaking of liberation and equality. While African Americans used the church as a stepping stool to total freedom, white Christians too often used the church to assert further racial control and limit black opportunity.

Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone, along with many other African American voices, used each other's words and many other black leaders' words to support their claims on black liberation and the church. One voice commonly missing is that of W.E.B. Du Bois. Throughout the many decades since Du Bois, many understood his many writing to be lacking religious thought or consideration when interpreting black identity. Edward J. Bloom attempts to end this debate within his article "There Won't Be Any Rich People in Heaven." Bloom states that Du Bois discusses the significant role Christ played in the battle against white supremacy, capitalism, violence, imperialism, and

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[24] Ibid, 249.

misogyny.[25] Bloom uses scholarly writings and poetry by Du Bois to better identify and conclude his theological thinking surrounding race. Bloom explains, "Du Bois concluded that Christ would sympathize with black people in their oppressed condition and that he would chastise whites. Du Bois's black Christ embodied virtue in a nation mad with sin and malevolence." [26]

Du Bois used the morality of Christ and the church as a reasoning devise to address the sin of racial inequality, violence, and hate. Bloom explained that "Du Bois considered Christianity to be above all an ethical and practical religious system that encouraged individual morality, social equity, and universal brotherhood."[27] Faith was a tool in Du Bois' toolbox for his fight for Civil Rights.

The identity of black religion and church remains distinct from others. Although the word of God reads the same, the message and reasoning are different for many. From a world beginning in chains that directly moved into a country dictated by white oppression, the identity of religion within African American communities was built from the black experience making every black church, including Emery United Methodist Church, significant to the historical narrative.

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[25] Edward J. Bloom, "There Wont' Be Any Rich People in Heaven: The Black Christ, White Hypocrisy, and the Gospel According to W.E.B. Du Bois." *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 372.

[26] Ibid, 372.

[27] Ibid, 373-374.

Chapter 2: Emery United Methodist Church, 1869 to Present

Sitting directly in the center of Tennessee, Rutherford County has over 200 years of history. Playing a leading role within state politics, Murfreesboro, its county seat, once reigned as the Tennessee state capital from 1819 to 1826, during the Civil War, the Battle of Stones River ravaged the county.[28]

Lisa Tolbert's work *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee* analyzed the growth and expansion of Rutherford County from its beginnings in 1803 to the time of the Civil War. Repeating the words of an 1850s Murfreesboro citizen, Virginia Shelton, Colbert quotes, "Many come in for the purpose of educating their children – some purchase property and engage in business - everything around us bears the appearance of a most flourishing community."[29] Other observations of Murfreesboro's growth come from surrounding counties describing the town as a previously crumbling wooden town with an old frame house now is home to the rise of beautiful homes and new commodious business houses.[30] While the population boomed and the architecture expanded, so did the number of enslaved in Rutherford County.

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[28] Carlton C. Sims, ed., *A History of Rutherford County* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: privately printed, 1947), 25-27. Alexander F. Stevenson, *The Battle of Stone's River near Murfreesboro, Tenn.: December 30, 1862, to January 3, 1863* (Gettysburg, PA: Civil War Times, 1974).

[29] Lisa C. Colbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1.

[30] Ibid, 2.

In 1810, there were a total of 10,265 people living within Rutherford County. Of this population, 7,527 were free whites, while 2,701 were enslaved African Americans owned by 412 slave owners. By 1860 the population grew to 14,743 whites living in Rutherford County, 190 free persons of color, and 12,984 enslaved belonging to 1,316 enslavers.[31]

Table 1. Population Chart of Rutherford County, Tennessee, 1810 - 1880.

Year	Total Population	Whites	Slaves	Free Colored
1810	10,265	7,527	2,701	
1820	19,552	14,441	5,187	200
1830	26,134	17,324	8,649	161
1840	24,280	15,042	9,072	166
1850	29,122	16,910	11,978	234
1860	27,918	14,934	12,984	190
1870	33,289	16,807		16,478
1880	36,741	20,248		16,493

Source: John Lodl, "Building Viable Black Communities: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1860-1880" (master's thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2004).

Of the 12,984 enslaved, only 897 resided within the city limits of Murfreesboro, making the rural areas outside of the town square where most African American communities would be established following emancipation.

The DG Beers & Co. map of Rutherford County from 1878 highlights the expansive area of what is Rutherford County. As shown in Figure. 1, the county is divided into districts, and at the center sits the city center of Murfreesboro. The vast rural

[31] John Lodl, "Building Viable Black Communities: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1860-1880" (M.A. thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2004), 19-20.

areas surrounding the center of town are shown to scale within the map, highlighting the extensive agricultural areas where once enslaved peoples built communities after emancipation.

During the Reconstruction era, district 21 within Rutherford County was predominantly rural land used for agricultural purposes. The population was a mixture of white landowners and preciously enslaved African Americans, most of whom came from nearby plantations. Freed people established the Emery community circa 1867. Documented church histories claim the name of Emery was a dedication to the remembrance of the late Bishop Emory.[32] The central institution of the Emery community was Emery Church, also known by many other names throughout the years, including Emery Chapel, Emery Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Emery Methodist Church, and Emery United Methodist Church. Located at the crossroads of Emery Road and Osborne Road, the church was the focus of a long-term African American community.

[32] Church History, box 2, folder 30, Emery Church Collection 1904-2018, Rutherford County Archives.

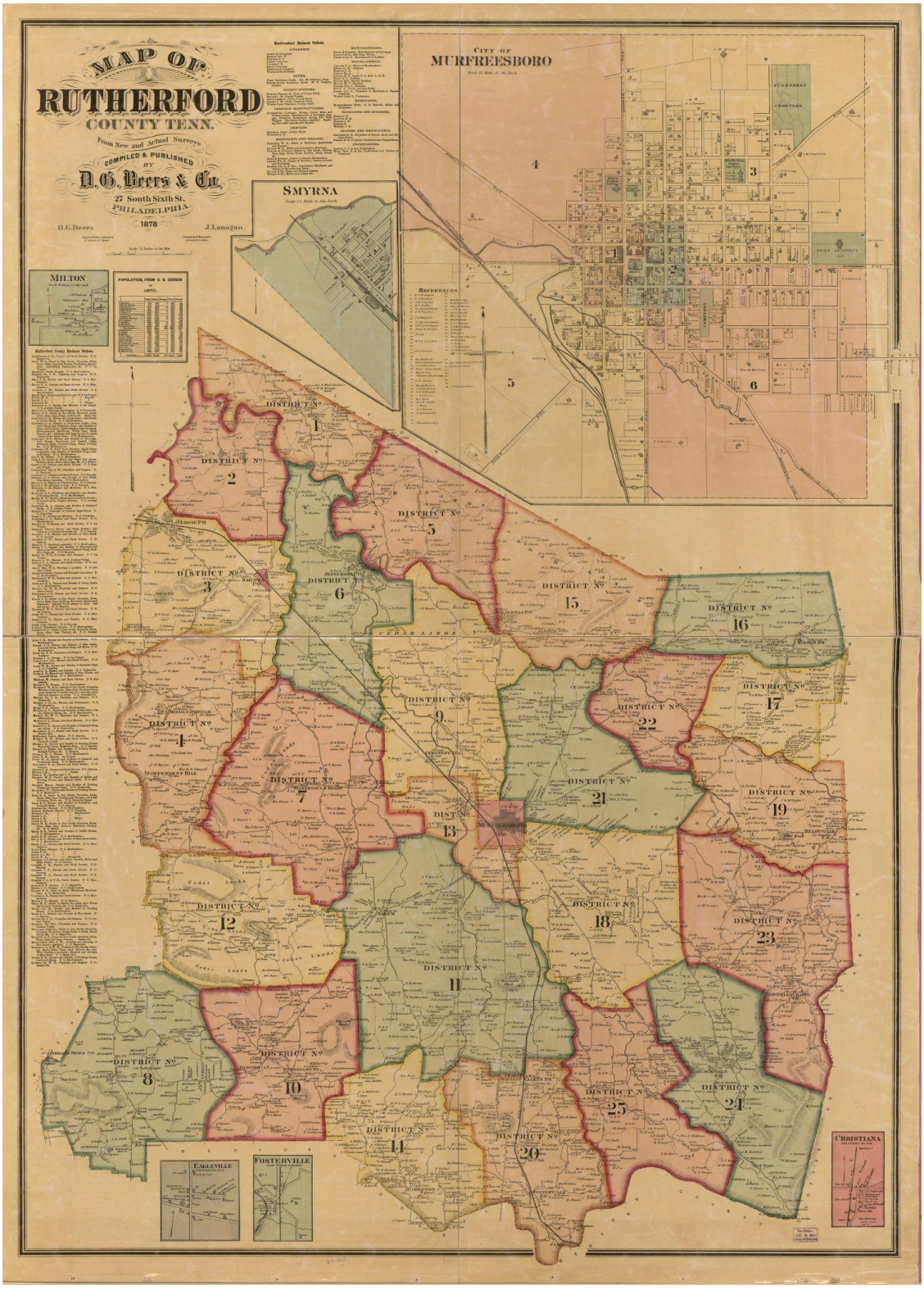

Figure. 1 D & G Beers Co. Map of 1978

Figure. 2 D & G Beers Co. Map of 1978 District 21

Emery Chapel and Church

In 1869 a group of Black Methodists established Emery Chapel on land donated by prominent Rutherford County resident Dr. H.H. Clayton. Clayton worked as a physician throughout his many years in Rutherford County but dealt heavily in real estate during the Civil War and after. Clayton purchased and sold land, plantations, and farms that were either seized due to participation in the “Confederate Rebellion” or abandoned lands from Confederate soldiers following the Battle of Stones River and General

Bragg's retreat.[33] Many records show Clayton leasing these homes and lands to other citizens throughout Rutherford County.

Founders Brother Anthony Black, Brother Jim S. Rucker, Brother William Rucker, and Brother Alex Watkins are said to have been "dedicated to God's work, through the heritage of their ancestors."[34] From the original organization and construction of the church, Emery Chapel used their faith in God and worship to overcome all obstacles they faced.

According to church histories compiled by previous and current church members, the original church building burned down in the late 1890s. The members of the church continued to hold service beneath a brush harbor until the rebuilding of the church in 1898.[35] At the time of the fire, the one-room schoolhouse sat on the same plot of land as Emery Chapel, named Emery School. Also rebuilt in the early years of the 1900s, there is an indication that, like Emery Chapel, Emery School did not survive the fire.[36] Emery

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[33] The United States Freedmen's Bureau, Land and Property Records 1865-1872. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861 - 1880; the United States Freedmen's Bureau, Land and Property Records 1865-1872, Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.

[34] This information was provided by current members of Emery United Methodist Church. The quote was compiled within a church history by the current long-time church members and descendant of founding member Patricia Watkins. The collection of documents, including church histories, can be found at the Rutherford County Archive.

[35] Church History, box 2, folder 30, Emery Church Collection 1904-2018, Rutherford County Archives.

[36] There is no official record stating the exact date the church burned. There is also no official record of the Emery School burning in this incident. These claims come from similar dates of destruction through church history records.

Chapel, now known as Emery Church, found themselves hit by tragedy for a second time on March 25, 1935. Strong winds from an overnight storm leveled the church to its bones.[37] The church house was rebuilt two years later in 1937, highlighting the fortitude and resilience of the church and all that worshipped within.

For the next many decades' Emery Church remained a home of worship and community. The church building remained intact for many years until the third and final tragedy. Once again, Emery United Methodist Church was damaged by strong winds from nearby tornadoes on May 11, 2003. The building did not completely collapse but was deemed unsafe for activity. For the next year, service was held at Broadmore Assistant Living until the re-opening of the restored building in 2004.[38] Congregants from the church made the statement, "as for our for fathers and mothers strong heritage and God's never-failing mercies, Emery United Methodist Church will re-open its doors."[39] The church building was changed during the repairs following the 2003 damage. The church was layered with brick rather than being rebuilt with an original wood façade. Emery Church faced tragic and overwhelming circumstances from their beginning years, but with an uninterrupted connection to their ancestors and their heritage for over one hundred years, the church and the members rebuilt for God and their community. A symbol of this resilience is the lasting cornerstone of the church, which

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[37] "House and Barns," *Daily News-Journal* (Murfreesboro, TN), March 26, 1935.

[38] "Church Calendar," *Daily News-Journal* (Murfreesboro, TN), October 10, 2003.

[39] Church History, box 2, folder 30, Emery Church Collection 1904-2018, Rutherford County Archives.

remained intact through the storm and fire as a reminder of the strength of the community. (See Figure. 7)

Figure 3. Wooden façade of Emery United Methodist Church. Photo courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation (MTSU), taken during a 2001 building survey in Rutherford County.

Figure 4. Frame elevation of Emery United Methodist Church. Photo courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation (MTSU), taken during a 2001 building survey in Rutherford County

Figure 5. Front of Emery United Methodist Church after 2003 brick installation.

Figure 6. Side of Emery United Methodist Church after 2003 brick installation.

Figure 7. Church cornerstone. The image was taken at the church on October 10, 2021, by Alexis Matrone

Emery School

On November 11, 1882, William Rucker and Robert Black, original members and trustees of Emery Church, deeded a one-half acre of land to school directors M. Pitts, J.C. Sanders, and Joseph Bowling.[40] This donated church land, over time, would house the two Emery Schools. In this late reconstruction era African American community, it was an achievement to hold land in their name and to donate and entrust to school directors and the county's public education system; this land highlights the forward-thinking of the Emery community. They knew that for the Emery community to grow and sustain, education was a necessity and a right not always given to people of color. In the years of Jim Crow, African Americans were only allowed to attend schools, but these schools were not available to all communities. Bus routes were not available to many children of rural African American communities, and the distance of these schools would call for an unimaginable commute on foot, making Emery School an impactful contribution to the growth of the community.

The original school was a one-room school building for Emery community's young members, which opened to students in 1883. There is no found record of what happened to the original schoolhouse. *The Nashville Globe,* a black religious newspaper, published an article on August 21, 1908, stating the Emery School within Murfreesboro was growing at a successful rate with over fifty students.[41] The second school was another one-room framed building with front and back doors and paned glass windows at

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[40] Deed Book 26, pg. 414. Rutherford Country Register of Deeds Office.

[41] "Emery Notes" *The Nashville Globe,* August 21, 1908.

the back. Another room with no outside door but windows was later added to the north side of the building, making the updated schoolhouse L-shaped. After 1956 a previously constructed house with a tine roof was moved behind the school and attached to the main schoolhouse by attaching a breezeway, this addition served as a kitchen.[42]

The second of the Emery Schools became a Rosenwald school in 1924. Rosenwald schools helped rural African American communities progress in education with schoolhouses and funding, amongst other things. Julius Rosenwald, one of the pioneers of the Rosenwald School programs, is said to have "chose schools as his contributions to a better environment that would afford African Americans their fair chance."[43] Emery School held a number of children taught by one teacher at a time. Apart from the standard curriculum Emery School also participated in the Blue Ribbon Program, which provided the students with inoculation shots and taught better hygiene practices. A significant practice was proper dental care.[44]Rosenwald funded Emery School $400 for programs and education, with the surrounding African American community raising and donating $496. The contributions from the community demonstrate the profound communal support and encouragement for the future of Emery community and its youth.

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[42] "A History of Rutherford County Schools to 1972," Rutherford County Historical Society, 1986.

[43] Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 29.

[44] "Emery, Rutherford County, TN," Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, Fisk University, http://rosenwald.fisk.edu.

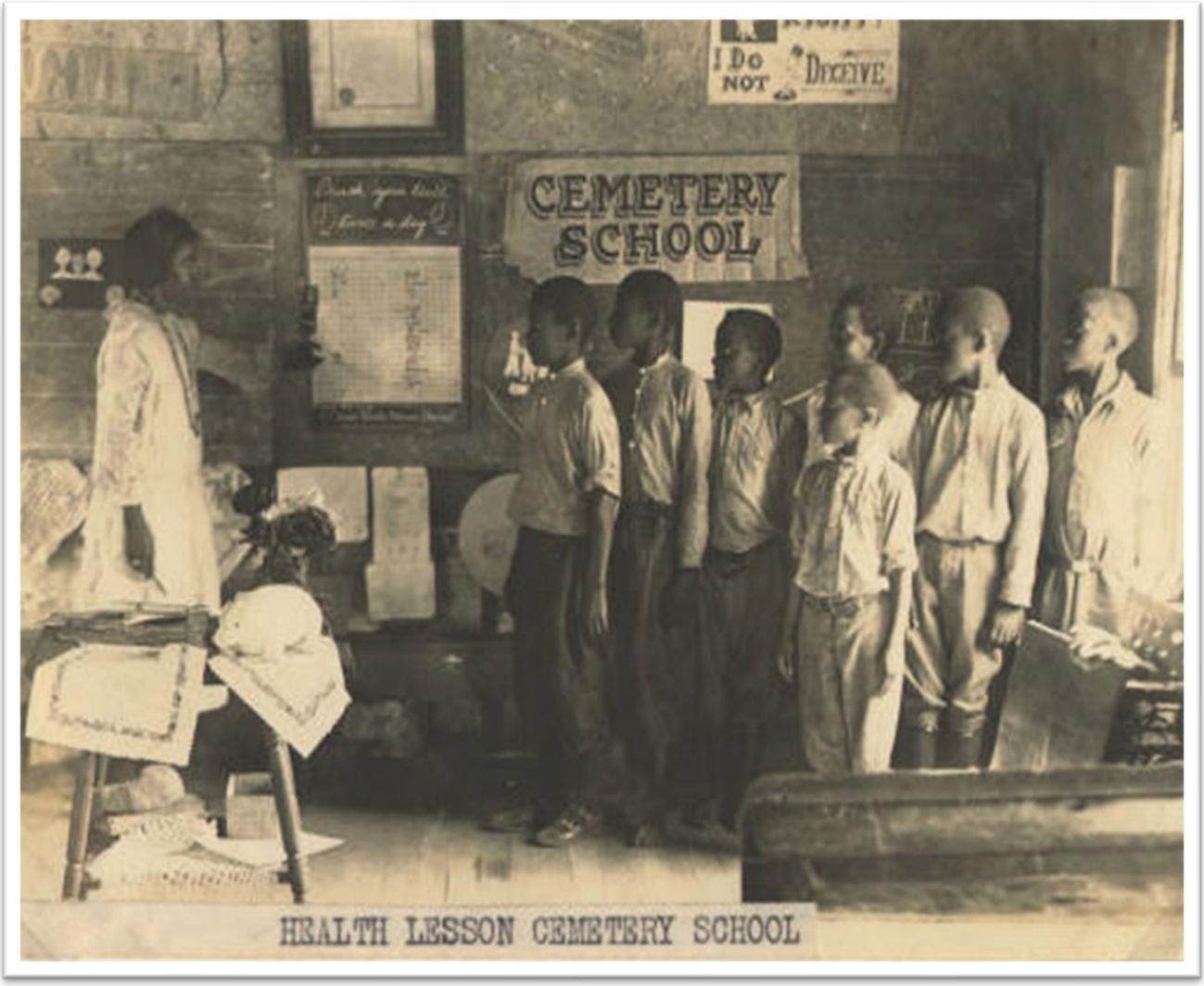

Figure 8. This image comes from the Cemetery School, a local African American community in Murfreesboro, TN. Source: "Putting stars on clean teeth chart," Mustard, Harry S. (Harry Stoll), 1889-1966, 1924-1928, 32889, Tennessee Historical Society, Tennessee Virtual Archive.

On January 27, 1958, Emery School, along with two other African American schools, consolidated into the Shiloh School for black students. The land was sold to Johnny Matthews and Della S. Brown, where they converted the school into a house but later burned down.[45] Even without the physical building as a reminder, Emery School

[45] Deed Book 124, pg. 5. Rutherford County Register of Deeds Office.

symbolizes communal growth and progression within a rural black community. While Emery School sought to educate the children of Emery community, the school also provided a platform of opportunity for the educators within the school. Many of the teachers of Emery School also lived in Emery community and dedicated their time to the progression of education for African American children.

Prominent Leaders of Emery

Post emancipation life for many previous enslaved people was a brutal battle entering into a new semi-free world. While work and family ring among the major responsibilities of individuals in the country, African Americans felt the many other pressures of Reconstruction. Individuals of Emery community continued forward, establishing churches, schools, jobs, and homes. Two of the founding members of Emery Church, Anthony Black and Anthony Watkins, both worked hard on the establishment of their land and farms, which both owned, as well as the establishment and growth of Emery Chapel. The 1870 census list both Black and Watkins as employers and landowners in the twenty-first district of Murfreesboro.[46] Jim S. Rucker and Will Rucker, not known to be of relation, it was common for once enslaved people to take the last name of their owner at the time, also owned their own land and farm within Emery community.[47] All four men were married with multiple children during the 1870s census.

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[46] 1910; Census Place: Civil District 21, Rutherford, Tennessee. 1910 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006; 1870; Census Place: District 21, Rutherford, Tennessee. 1870 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009.

[47] 1920; Census Place: Civil District 21, Rutherford, Tennessee. 1920 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

Although the men carried the responsibility of owning and maintaining their farmland, they also took on the responsibility of establishing a church within their community. While the founders of this church and leading members of the community may not have the thickest and most documented histories, their importance is still of the greatest magnitude.

As the years of Emery Church went on and the Emery School was established, the women of the community made their significant contributions and lasting names within the Rutherford County school system. One of the most notable teachers was Emery School was local women Nannie G. Rucker. Starting as a teacher at Emery School, Nannie Rucker worked towards her bachelor's degree in education.[48] In 1947 Nannie was selected to appear before a committee in Washington D.C. to testify for a grant of education funding for one-room room schools. An article within the *Knoxville News Sentinel* stated:

> Top educators and teachers from one-room county schoolhouses appeared before a subcommittee of the Senate of Labor and Public Welfare Committee to endorse a bill by four Republican and four Democratic Senators to furnish up to $250,000 in Federal grants annually for three years to help the states improve educational facilities. One of the sponsors is Committee Chairman Robert A. Taft.[49]

Nannie Rucker continued in education within Rutherford County for the remainder of her career, always moving African American needs forward. Graduating from Tennessee State University with B.S. in elementary education she went on to earn her M.S. degree n

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[48] "Negro Junior Red Cross Council Meets, Plans Work," *Daily News-Journal* (Murfreesboro), August 1, 1948.

[49] "Tennessee Teacher Tells Congress Her Pay After Taxes in $866; Thinks About Becoming a Maid," *The Knoxville News Sentinel,* April 22, 1947.

Educational Psychology in 1957. Nannie Rucker also attended Fisk University Tuskegee Institute, and George Peabody College for Teachers.[50] Along with her long and successful career in education Nannie Rucker also had a trailblazing career in politics serving on the state Democratic Executive committee as well as serving on the Rutherford County School Board.[51]

The Tennessean would call her a Murfreesboro Civil Rights leader and veteran after she was the first African American female elected to the Tennessee delegation.[52]

Emery Church, along with Emery School, has a history of everlasting faith and an unbreakable will for survival and progression. The many leaders of the church each contributed to the growth of not only the church and school but to the building blocks of a Rutherford County community (See Table. 2). While I would like to name every member that worked, worshiped, or supported Emery Church, this work seeks to represent Emery as a symbolic community of fortitude and resilience.

[50] "Miss Rucker Announces," *The Daily News-Journal*, August 2, 1970.

[51] "Nannie Rucker Honored," *The Daily News-Journal*, January 7, 1973.

[52] "Columbia Man Delegate Chief," *The Tennessean*, June 13, 1972.

Rev. Ridley	Rev. J.D. Edwards Dough
Rev. Azriah Ransom	Rev. S.S. Tatem
Rev. J.B. Bradford	Rev. Earl S. Anderson
Rev. David Scott	Rev. T.G. Rucker
Rev. Henry Primm	Rev. P.Y. Marchbanks
Rev. J.F.D. Finnelle	Rev. James S. Gasden
Rev. J.H.C. Means	Rev. Robert U. Green
Rev. Ben F. Anderson	Rev. William Reed Smith
Rev. H.P. Belcher	Rev. Daniel M. Hayes
Rev. P.R. Woodson	Rev. Fredrick Yebuah
Rev. Frank Smith	Rev. Dogan Williams
Rev. Miles Williams	Rev. Alvin Goodwin
Rev. John Louis	Rev. Farai Muzorero
Rev. J.R. Gray	Rev. Kenneth Edmondson
Rev. L.K. Hawkins	Rev. Issaac Davis
Rev. W.M. Neal	Rev. John Young
Rev. J.T. Patilo	Rev. Arthur Ford
Rev. L.O. Dixon	Rev Virgian Yeargins
Rev. S.P. McDonald	Rev. Gwedndolyn Brown-Felder
Rev. Nathaniel Smith	Rev. Angela Ford

Table. 2 Pastors of Emery's past and present in chronological order.

The Importance of Emery

It was not an easy challenge for Emery Community to grow in the ways they did coming out of the Civil War. A number of hurdles, including white dominance, racially inept legislation, and a past of mental and physical suppression, contributed to the difficulty of developing a successful personal life, let alone an entire community. For instance, in *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree*, William Montgomery writes that no

more than five percent of ex enslaved could read in the immediate years of emancipation, and the schooling opportunities were scarce for many. Montgomery goes on to explain:

> one of the freedman's strongest and most immediate aspirations, obtaining an education, was deeply rooted in their deprivation throughout the long years of bondage of the opportunity to learn much beyond what was necessary to perform their assigned tasks. Belying the common assertion that Africans were not capable of book learning and had no interest in it, the enslaved craved knowledge, sought it out and deeply resented being denied it. [53]

Emery community proves this to be true. Immediately following emancipation, formerly enslaved people of Rutherford County and others came together to create an inclusive, safe space for religion, education, and free thought. The one-room church provided the community with just this space.

Other African American Methodist churches throughout Rutherford County provided solace for their congregants, but their history provided the churches with individual identities. During the antebellum period in Murfreesboro, nearly half of the members of the Methodist Church were black and of these members worshiped in the same church as the whites. For instance, Jerry Brookshire writes in the *Rutherford Country Historical Society* that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had joint services with both whites and enslaved until the new construction of the church in 1843, where a separate gallery was built for the enslaved to sit.[54] Other churches had separate worshiping services altogether, but the white influence over the churches remained.

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[53] William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 142-143.

[54] Jerry H. Brookshire, "Methodists and Murfreesboro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Rutherford County Historical Society* 10 (Winter 1978): 65-66.

African American congregations formed postwar such as African Methodist Episcopal Church which would be renamed Allen Chapel in later years, and the larger Methodist Episcopal Church, now known as Key Memorial. These churches would cater to the urban landscape of African American religious life and, with that, developed an identity of politics, reform, and individualism that separated them from one-room rural churches. While each African American church provides to its community in many ways, Emery Church was the center of their community. The church was built by blacks, for blacks, and rebuilt on multiple occasions by the black Emery Community. Emery Church helped build Emery Community.

While the rural factor of Emery Church provides to its significant and distinguishing features, it also provides risk. With church numbers falling nationwide, the small church has begun dwindling in size. While Homecoming celebrations still bring in long-time congregants across many states, the weekly number of congregants is small. In the more recent years of the twenty-first century, Rutherford County and Murfreesboro bear witness to a significant boom in population and growth. The once open farmland where Emery Church sits is now a developing suburban area. In an interview with Rev. Virginia Yeargin, a long-time pastor at Emery United Methodist Church explains that with the building of expensive homes all around Emery, "no one is moving to a small country church causing the congregation to fall dramatically, no one can afford it." [55] By working with members of the community to preserve this historic African American church, we can solidify the importance to Rutherford County and the people of Emery

[55] Telephone conversation with Reverend Virginia Yeargin, April 11, 2021. Permission was given for the quote.

Community and their families. We can help them on their quest of never losing that heritage and faith that was the inspiring motivation that moved Emery Community forward through so many difficult years.

Chapter 3: The Preservation Efforts of Emery Church

As scholarship and education on African American heritage, culture, and history have progressed through the years, the church is continuously labeled as the center of African American life, dating back to the years of enslavement into Reconstruction and through to modern times. Through the many efforts of preservationist and historical societies, rural churches are now being recognized as properties of the highest priority for preservation. Beginning in the fall of 1997, the Center for Historic Preservation, in conjunction with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Office of Sponsored Programs at Middle Tennessee State University, initiated a program documenting rural African American churches in small towns with the goal of spreading the education and program throughout the South and to prepare National Register of Historic Places nominations for eligible church properties.[56] The Center for Historic Preservation published their work with the project titled the Tennessee Rural African-American Church Project in *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches in the South*. This work served as one of the main instructional guidelines to follow while working with Emery Church on the preservation of historical church documents and later the documenting of their history.

One of the most critical steps in this project is building a relationship with the members of Emery Church. It is in my opinion that the building of trust calls for a lasting

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[56] The Center for Historic Preservation. *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches*, 2000, 5.

relationship to ensure the best quality of work for the community. Lila Teresa Church states that the first step when working to document African American communities is the proper outreach strategies. Church states that by extending outreach and gaining trust among the donors of the documents enables archivists and preservationists to establish a rapport with African American communities and vice versa. After building the relationship, one can begin seeking out and collecting materials. Church's explanation as to why this process is essential and needs doing strategically and professionally is to "place a special focus on the development of local African American collections, rather than entrusting this history to serendipity or occasional documentation activities."[57]

There has been a lack of work done within African American and other silenced communities, and because of that, there is little to go on when looking for public history guides. Only in more recent years has scholarship begun to widely spread in regard to helping preserve documents, buildings, and histories of ignored communities. Lynn Rainville, author, and public historian worked for nearly two decades within African American cemeteries and communities before releasing her work *Hidden Histories*.[58] Rainville does an outstanding job describing these communities and her experiences and puts forth informative research techniques used throughout the massive study. Throughout the book, there are many maps and images to help guide the reader through the research, but there is also a sense that Rainville is putting together a guide for further

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[57] Lila Teresa Church, "Documenting Local African American Community History: Some Guidelines for Consideration," *History News* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 1.

[58] Lynn Rainville, *Hidden Histories: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

investigation. By giving detailed explanations into the processes of the study, Rainville provides an example of how to work with communities that have been falsely told of their insignificance for so long. Rainville successfully puts forth a research practice guide for future scholars with the lack of previous scholarly examples. The stories of her discussions with the members of the communities and the examples of nineteenth-century family cemeteries, Rainville sets examples of public history practices and material culture scholarship that are not to be ignored. Listening and communicating within the homes of some of these individuals strengthens the very fragile relationship between African Americans and white academics. She gains their trust and, in return, presents research that highlights and preserves the stories of communities and the families within. By doing so, Rainville brilliantly shines a spotlight on these African American communities and their contributions to the cultural makeup which significantly provides to history.

By using the examples of Rainville, Church, and the public history project done by the Center for Historic Preservation, the work with Emery Church is structured with three main goals. 1) With the intent of building a lasting relationship with myself, the Center for Historic Preservation and the members of Emery community and Emery Church. A trusting relationship will encourage further work in the preservation of the community's history. 2) The collection of church documents to be cleaned, preserved, and archived. 3) Provide the church with a historical marker that will sit out front of the building. The Center for Historic Preservation will also provide a museum panel display to the church. This work sets forth to provide public history guidelines for future work within historic rural African American communities by completing these three steps.

Building a Viable Relationship

As the project began, it was most important that the church and the wanting members be fully involved in the process. During the first meeting, I was met by Pastor Angela Ford and Patricia Watkins. During this meeting, I was given a tour of the church, which proceeded with a long conversation on how the church dealt with matters surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Within this conversation, I was made aware that Patricia Watkins, who goes by the nickname of Pat, holds all the church documents within her home. With the long history of storms that destroyed previous church buildings, this was the route deemed safest. This was not an uncommon practice by rural churches, including the nearby Bethel Missionary Methodist Church. Living only one-half mile from the church, Pat quickly returned with a box of documents she felt would be intriguing. The box contained records dating back to the first decade of the nineteen hundreds. Pat also brought along with her a personal page from her family bible that has been in use since the early eighteen hundreds. The bible page listed the names and dates of birth of the Watkins family from 1832. The following steps became apparent, the protection of these documents was mandatory. With enthusiasm and intrigue on both sides, it was time to contact the local archives.

John Lodl from the Rutherford County Archives accompanied me on the following meeting at Emer Church with Pastor Angela and Pat. More documents filled the small church meeting room. After browsing and conversating, it was decided that with the help of John and the county archives, the documents would be transported, cleaned, preserved, and returned. If the document owners would like them stored in the

archives, that would be decided at a later date. Although the conversation went smoothly, there was a sense of unrest that filled the room. The members of the church are parting with documents, although temporarily, that they have cherished for over one hundred years. The documents are what remains of a past that has burned and blown away on multiple occasions. Using examples from previous public historians such as Rainville, who, while searching for African American cemeteries, would sit in the private living rooms for coffee with descendant family members of the dead, I was aware that clear and constant communication was necessary to make everyone more comfortable with this process.

The ongoing communication with Pastor Angela and Patricia Watkins provided me with more insight into the history of Emery Church than was available online. Pat told stories of walking down the dirt roads in the early 1950s with her grandfather of the same last name to church every Sunday. Walking by foot down the unpaved roads, she would sit with her grandfather for service either in the blistering heat or the gnawing cold, but the sense of togetherness surrounded by God and neighbors made it all worth it.[59] The sense of community does not come from population figures or deed records; it comes from the people around you.

Communication with Pastor Angela Ford and Patricia Watkins continues and is still active. Each step taken through the archival process and later the exhibits provided is all done with their insight, opinions, and approval.

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[59] This information comes from conversations during informal meetings with long-time member and descendant Patricia Watkins. These meetings were not recorded or documented.

The Archival Process

Emery Church member Patricia Watkins generously and temporarily donated boxes of church records dating back over a century so they could be cleaned and protected, and later digitized. There was a total of three boxes of materials ranging from church minutes, certificates, military papers, and newspapers, to name only a few. Many of the documents were fragile, with torn pages and rusting staples. The beginning of this process consisted of organizing and taking inventory by listing each item with a short description. From there, we determined which items needed to be cleaned, pressed, hydrated, and encapsulated.

Once all items are inventoried, and decisions are made for each item on what course of action to take, the dirty can begin. There are a number of steps that must be taken depending on what the document or item is in need of. Below is a list and description of steps taken on what will later be named the Emery Church Collection.

Figure 9. Image of beginning processes during the preservation of documents and archival process. Taken at the Rutherford County Archives in Murfreesboro, TN.

Cleaning: Each document is opened and thoroughly cleaned using various tools commonly found in an archival room. Brushes and sponges are used to clean the many years of dirt and debris compiled on the items. Each page needs to be thoroughly but carefully brushed without destroying or ripping any pages of the items. Archival bone folders are used to gently remove creases and folded pages if necessary. This will help later during the digitizing process to ensure flat surfaces while scanning. Tweezers are used to remove any metal such as staples which, if left, will escalate the deterioration process. Once each page and each item are cleaned, it is time to move on to the preservation process.

Preservation: Not all items need to follow the same steps of preservation. As earlier discussed, each item is examined, and a decision was made on how to best move forward with the protection and preservation of each item. The more current items and well-maintained items need only be cleaned, labeled, and digitized. Other items need more care and protection. Many items of the Emery Church Collection, including newspapers and other official church documents, needed to take part in an overnight hydrating process using distilled water. After the document is hydrated and pressed, removing any sharp folds, the item can then be opened for further cleaning without the risk of the paper breaking or encapsulated for further protection. Encapsulating an item between two polyester sheets is done to fragile documents in threat of breakage or ruin. This process was used on many documents in the Emery Church Collection to ensure the long-lasting health of the

material. Once the conservation process of the items is complete, the items are then organized into a specific grouping as seen fit by the archivist and are ready for the digitizing process.

Creating a Digital Collection: A digital collection is created for a number of reasons. In the case of the Emery Church Collection, it was agreed during discussions with the owners of the documents that each item be returned. The digitizing of these items ensures that the information is available for future use and scholarship. Second, it is the final conservation process to ensure all documents remain available to the church and the members in case of destruction of the original copies. The document owners are given clear instructions on where to find the digital copies of the items if not available online. Each page from each item was carefully scanned and input into the Rutherford Country Archives database.

Labeled and Organized: The final step to the archival process is organizing the documents using a labeling system created during the first inventory of the items. From here, each item is given a number within a numbered folder, within a numbered Hollinger box. Each number is recorded in an orderly collection data set with a brief description of each item. A finding aid is created for future researchers to quickly locate the item they are seeking.

It is important to remember that through the preservation and archival process, I was sure to remain aware that these items did not belong to either myself or the county

archive. Each step made, whether it be the removal of staples of paperwork or encapsulating documents were discussed with Patricia Watkins beforehand. There was no decision made without clear communication between myself and the owner of the documents. By taking this step, one can continue building the trust between an academic representing an institution and the people within the community in which you are working.

The preservation of documents, buildings, and histories of African American communities has been ignored and at times purposely destroyed, making the material found today significantly important to American and local histories. Agnese Ghezzi explains this matter in her article “Filing the World,” where she relates how the choice of what to archive and what not to archive is made to remain ignorant to the histories and heritage of select groups in relation to government treatment. Ghezzi states, "there is nothing neutral in the way societies decide what should be preserved and what should be discarded."[60] By preserving, digitizing, and archiving historic materials, the history of the silenced and ignored African American communities can be remembered and understood.

Exhibit Panels and Historic Marker

In other cases of projects surrounding African American churches, the final goal is to highlight the eligibility and prepare the property for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, Emery Church does not meet the criteria for such a nomination due to the heavy changes made in 2003, after the destruction and

[60] Agnese Ghezzi, “Filing the World: Archives as Cultural Heritage and the Power of Remembering*,” International Journal of Constitutional Law* 19, no. 5 (December 2021): 1738-1739.

restoration of the third church building, which does not take away from the significance of the church to the outlying community of Emery. As stated in Powerful Artifacts:

> Historic rural African-American churches are, above all, historical artifacts of the creation, development, persistence, and continuity of three vital interrelated components of African-American ethnic heritage: ethnic identity, religion, and education.[61]

This is no truer than with Emery Church. Another method to display the historical significance of Emery Church is installing a historical marker in front of the church building and the creation and installation of exhibit panels that will hang out the walls of the church meeting room. With suburban encroachment on the property, it is essential to display a marker for the neighboring properties to view. The display of these markers will represent the acknowledgment of significance to the community while simultaneously doing the same to surrounding parties. It is a small step in the right direction in the representation of silenced African American communities. In order to complete this process, a third party is required for the creation and installment of the marker. The first of these parties is the African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County (AAHSRC) which has a long history of providing historical markers to African American heritage sites and properties, such as Holloway High School in Murfreesboro. Another program that distributes historic markers is the Tennessee Historical Commission. This program has installed over 2000 markers, many of which are centered around African American history. During this time, both the AAHSRC and the Tennessee Historical

[61] The Center for Historic Preservation. *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches*, 2000, 27.

Commission have been consulted on the plans for the installation of a historical marker for Emery Church.

The Center for Historic Preservation will support the printing and installment of exhibit panels that will be installed in the community room of Emery Church to display. The panels will state the origins of the church in 1869 and highlight the church as the center of Emery community. Separate sections of the exhibit will also tell a story of the many tragedies that Emery Church has faced throughout the years while highlighting the perseverance and strength Emery has shown. The final section will include the dedication to education through the first Emery School and its time as a Rosenwald School. It is important to remember that this is not our history it is theirs. The complete inclusion of the members of Emery Church is a requirement before finalizing any designs on the exhibit panels. The information provided in the display must be decided upon and agreed to by the members before moving forward (See Figure 5). A rough draft of the display will be provided, and any changes recommended will be accepted. The work done with Emery community and church is not an act of providing Emery Church with their history, it is not ours, this project is to act as a bridge between community and institution to highlight their history as they see fit.

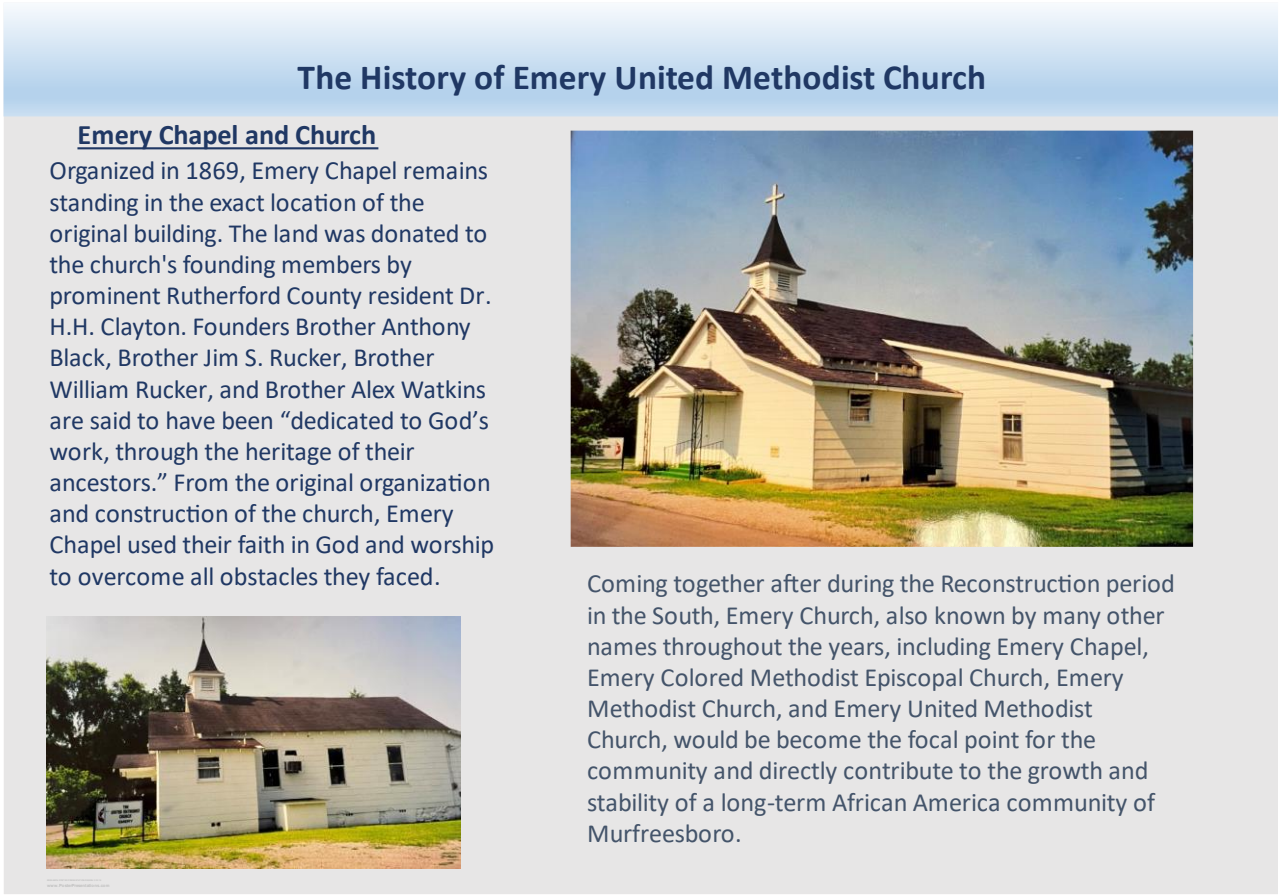

Figure 10. Rough Draft of Emery Church panel 1 exhibit. Created by Alexis Matrone.

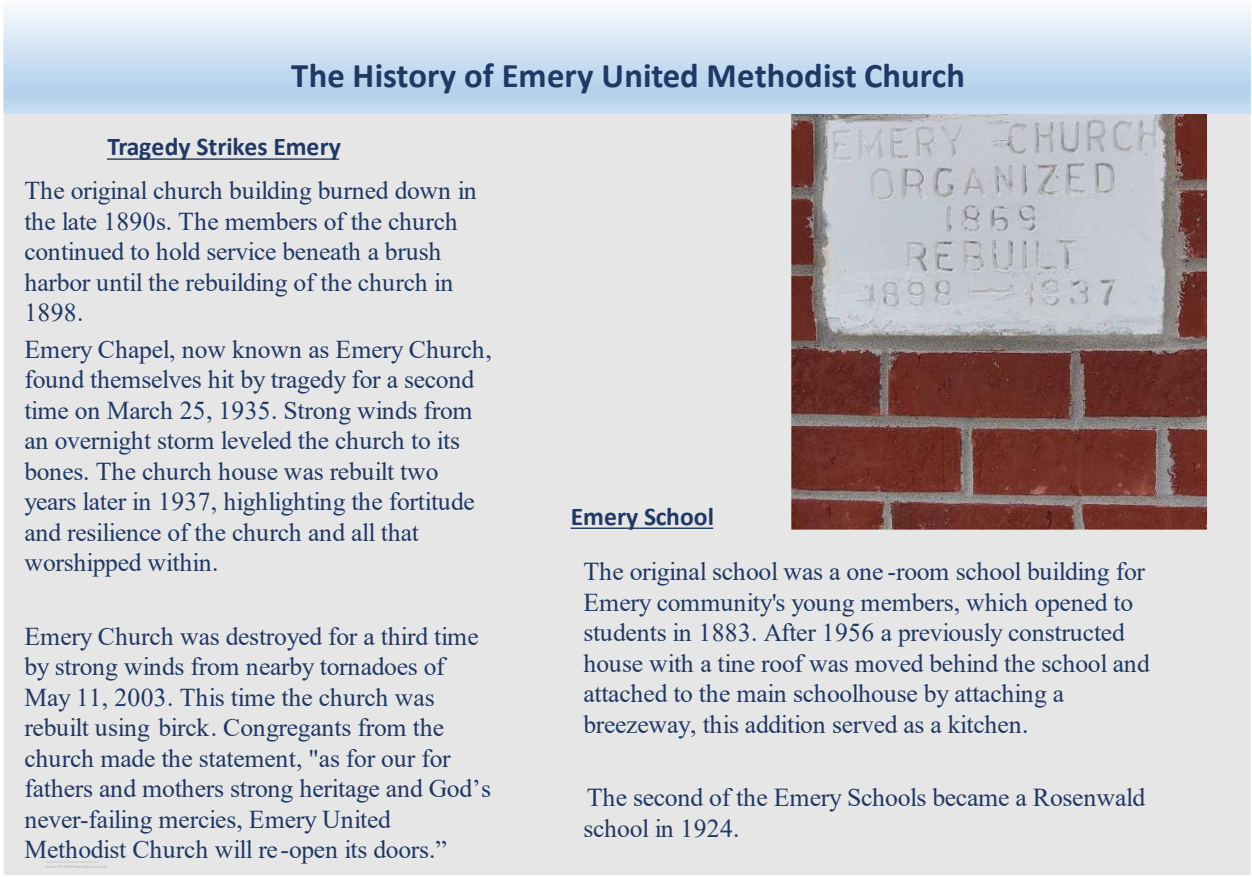

Figure 11. Rough Draft of Emery Church panel 2 exhibit. Created by Alexis Matrone.

On-Going Work with Emery Church

The work being done with Emery Church should not stop here. Many steps can and should be taken to further the development of information known about Emery community and Church. Through continued conversations with Patricia Watkins, there are many descendant members that have recently moved out of the area. While contact is still able to be made, oral histories can be recorded. Firsthand accounts of the church and life within the community continue to shed light on the inner workings and development of such a community. These accounts are priceless to understanding the past of not only

Emery but to other communities within. By understanding the life within Emery Church, the understanding of an ignored rural African American community may be possible, and the best way to get there is by listening to the people.

Appendix A. The complete Emery Church Archival Collection. Finding aid and digital archive of the collection can be found at the Rutherford County Archives in Murfreesboro, TN.

Box	Folder	Series	Description
1	1	Membership	Book of tithes and offerings from 1941-1942. Some meeting notes and minutes. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	2	Membership	Book of tithes and offerings from 1941-1943. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	3	Membership	Composition book of tithes and offerings 1942-1948.
1	4	Membership	Book of tithes, offerings, and church meeting notes from 1943-1945. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	5	Membership	Book of tithes, offerings, and church meeting notes from 1946-1948. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	6	Membership	Book of tithes, offerings, and church meeting notes from 1948-1948. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	7	Membership	Book of tithes and offerings from 1949-1950. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	8	Membership	Homecoming guest book from 1965-1983 including names, addresses, phone numbers.
1	9	Membership	Membership certificate receipts. Dates include: 1976, 1982, 1989, 1990, 2000, 2001, 2002.
1	10	Membership	Book containing membership log from 2002. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
1	11	Church Minutes	Book containing church minutes and notes from 1996-2002.

1	12	Church Minutes	First Quarterly Conference meeting notes. Meeting took place November 23, 1940.
2	1	Sunday School	Composition notebook containing Sunday school notes from 1935-1937.
2	2	Sunday School	University composition notebook containing Sunday school notes from 1941-1942.
2	3	Sunday School	Composition notebook containing Sunday school notes from 1944-1947.
2	4	Sunday School	Rex notebook containing Sunday school notes from 1947-1950. Subfolder included: Loose documents found within book.
2	5	Booklet and Programs	South Nashville District Conference program July 19-22, 1949.
2	6	Booklet and Programs	The 1966 journal of the Tennessee-Kentucky Methodist Church Conference booklet.
2	7	Booklet and Programs	Mr. Wesley Mitchell Obituary program. (1974)
2	8	Booklet and Programs	D. Martin Luther King, Jr. 34th Annual Senior Awards Banquet program. (2018)
2	9	Certificates	Watkins family Bible page containing birth records from 1832-1906.
2	10	Certificates	Copy of birth certificate: Samuel Hardin Watkins
2	11	Certificates	Death Certificate: Bettie (last name unknown)
2	12	Certificates	Methodist Men Certificate (1963-1970).
2	13	Certificates	Emery United Methodist Church payment certificate (2008)
2	14	Business Transactions	Handwritten deed (1904)
2	15	Business Transactions	Deed receipts (1904)
2	16	Business Transactions	Receipt of purchased land (September 25, 1945).

2	17	Business Transactions	County Clerk receipt
2	18	Business Transactions	Bank transaction receipt book (1951-1952)
2	19	Business Transactions	Tax records and receipts (1969-1977)
2	20	Business Transactions	Tax and inheritance paperwork (1972)
2	21	Business Transactions	Commerce Union Bank Hiddleston personal deposit book (1971-1978).
2	22	Business Transactions	Deed of Correction (1985).
2	23	Business Transactions	Banking and tax notes on loose-leaf paper (2006).
2	24	Business Transactions	Bank of America Deposit Tickets (2012-2014)
2	25	Newspapers	29th Anniversary Edition of The Murfreesboro Union 1920-1949.
2	26	Newspapers	Chicago Daily Defender April 5-April 11, 1969. "King: The Scholar, Statesman, Minister, and Exponent of Love."
2	27	Church History	Small summary of church history and pastors. Indicated that the church historian (2004) put together. Church historian still unknown.
2	28	Military Records	Army of the United States separation record for James H. Watkins (1946).
2	29	Military Records	Assignment orders/Qualification questionnaire/Transfer letter for Samuel Hardin Watkins (1952).
2	30	Loose Documents	Receipts and notes (1941).
2	31	Loose Documents	Tennessee Conference Methodist Church correspondence Bro. Watkins October 12, 1943.

2	32	Loose Documents	Tennessee-Kentucky Conference Appointments (1967-68).
2	33	Loose Documents	Receipts and notes (1972).
2	34	Loose Documents	Tithes and offerings,
2	35	Miscellaneous	Blank documents
3	1	Certificates	African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County "Pillars of Faith" honor (June 11, 2016). Folder included: Booklets and Programs: (2) programs from AAHS ceremony (June 11, 2016).
3	2	Newspapers	The Nashville Tennessean (April 6, 1968), Dr. King issues.
3	3	Certificates	Tennessee Public Schools Certificate Annie L. Crawford Emery School (April 26, 1907).

Source: Created by Alexis Matrone. The digital archive of the collection can be found at the Rutherford County Archives in Murfreesboro, TN.

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