

SILVER POINT CHURCH EXPECTED TO BE ADDED TO NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Lindsay McReynolds
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SILVER POINT -- On Wednesday, Silver Point residents saw the culmination of a couple years' worth of work toward the preservation of a building that was a significant part of the childhood of African Americans who lived there -- the West End Church of Christ in Silver Point.

At one of the three meetings it holds each year from the Clover Bottom Mansion on Lebanon Road in Nashville, Tennessee's Review Board for the National Register of Historic Places agreed Wednesday that the church was significant in ethnic heritage education and social history by sending it on to the "Keeper of the Register" in Washington D.C., where it is expected to be formally added to the National Register of Historic Places.

"I'm real excited," Silver Point resident Evelyn Buck said on Wednesday. "This is beginning to come together."

The development of the West End Church of Christ, also known as the Silver Point Christian Institute, in 1909 was instrumental in the lives of African Americans like Buck, who attended the one-room schoolhouse in the 1930s and '40s, when one teacher, Edna Beasley, taught eight grades of students.

The original building on Center Hill Dam Road in Silver Point was designed by architect P.H. Black for the African American community to use as a church and a school, according to the nomination application as prepared by historic preservation specialist Randy Williams of the Upper Cumberland Development District. The development of the church and school met a need for a small number of African Americans living in the Silver Point area.

Henry Clay, Sam Womack and Alexander Campbell served on the board of directors, and G.P. Bowser, a leading African American in the Church of Christ, was the principal, according to the nomination application. In 1913, religion, algebra, English, history and Latin were taught. A second building on the property housed a printing press used to publish the Christian Echo, which continues to operate at the Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, and is one of the longest running religious publications in America.

"The building is a tangible reminder and legacy of the early 20th Century efforts to provide for the spiritual and educational development of the local African American community, and its influence is still felt to this day," Williams writes in the nomination.

Members of state review board Wednesday agreed, with review board member Jim D. Rhody saying, "This is close to where I grew up. It's very significant in the African American community. Its influence extends to DeKalb County as well as Putnam County."

The church, which was founded by G.P. Bowser, also served as the Putnam County Normal and Industrial Orphanage, and Bowser was instrumental in lifting a restriction that African American children could attend school only four months out of the year.

In recognition of the West End Church of Christ's importance to the African American community, Joyce Ferrell Fuller, a graduate of the school who previously attended church there, initiated the effort to get the church on the National Register of Historic Places, according to Williams, who wrote the nomination and conducted research to get the nomination ready for the state review board on Wednesday.

The review board consists of historians, architects, archaeologists and planners from across the state appointed by the governor to consider nominations to the national register.

Tennessee Tech University history professor Michael Birdwell was appointed to the board a year ago, and was present for Wednesday's approval of the Silver Point church as well as a variety of other nominations from across the state.

In addition to the Silver Point church, nine other properties were approved Wednesday to be included in the National Register of Historic Places including the Beech Grove home in Davidson County, the concrete highway from Cleveland to Charleston in Bradley County, the Dunbar Public School in Loudon County, the A.R. Brown House in Unicoi County, the Robertson Family Farm in Hardeman County, a group of multi-family housing in Memphis and specifically the Knickerbocker Apartments, the Pippin Roller Coaster known as Elvis's favorite roller coaster in Memphis and the expanded boundary of the Southern Railway Industrial Historic District in Memphis.

Birdwell said in addition to the pride of the property owner, other benefits for being on the National Register of Historic Places includes tax breaks for businesses and individuals.

The tax break was a factor in a request for the extension of the Southern Railway Industrial Historic District as the property owner is trying to renovate that property back to its original condition for the purpose of apartments.

Changes made to a building on the national register have to maintain the historic look of the building to continue to be included on the national register, according to Birdwell.

Twelve properties were recommended for removal by the state review board on Wednesday. Most of those had been torn down, and one was damaged by fire.

The Silver Point West End Church of Christ will move on from its approval by the state review board on Wednesday to Washington D.C., where the formal announcement of the Silver Point church is expected to be made by the first of November.

The church will hold its 11th annual homecoming reunion Oct. 13-14 at the church featuring speakers from Tennessee, Indiana, Detroit, Michigan and Florida.

Other Putnam sites on the National Register of Historic Places include the Algood Methodist Church, the Arcade in Cookeville, the Broad Street Church of Christ, the Buffalo Valley School, the Burgess Falls Hydroelectric Station, the Cookeville Railroad Depot, the Cowen Farmstead, the Harding Studio and Henderson Hall at Tennessee Tech University.

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SILVER POINT CHURCH MAKES THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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Michael Birdwell, a Tennessee Tech University history professor and member of the Tennessee Review Board for the National Register, and Randy Williams, historic preservation planner for the Upper Cumberland Development District, at the West End Church of Christ in Silver Point. Herald-Citizen Photo/Lindsay McReynolds

SILVER POINT -- It's official. The West End Church of Christ in Silver Point is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Randy Williams, historic preservation planner with the Upper Cumberland Development District, notified the Herald-Citizen last week that the Silver Point church has now been officially recognized by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places.

The Silver Point church was recommended for acceptance into the National Register by the Tennessee Review Board for the National Register of Historic Places back in September, when the state group agreed that the church was significant in ethnic heritage education and social history.

The development of the West End Church of Christ, also known as the Silver Point Christian Institute, in 1909 was instrumental in the lives of African Americans like Silver Point resident Evelyn Buck, who attended the one-room schoolhouse in the 1930s and '40s, when one teacher, Edna Beasley, taught eight grades of students.

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In recognition of the West End Church of Christ's importance to the African American community, Joyce Ferrell Fuller, a graduate of the school who previously attended church there, initiated the effort to get the

church on the National Register, with the assistance of her daughter, Dr. Althea Armstrong.

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HISTORIC SILVER POINT CHURCH OF CHRIST

It was homecoming last Sunday at the West End Silver Point Church of Christ, which last December was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Members of the committee which planned the homecoming celebration are, above, from left, Ethel Sherill, Geraldine Tibbs, Thelma Beasley, Evelyn Buck, Joann Floyd, Virgil Carr, Betty Martin, Lillian Beasley and Mary Myers.

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A PIECE OF HISTORY

SILVER POINT CHURCH CELEBRATES 100TH YEAR WITH HOMECOMING IN OCTOBER

Liz Engel
Herald-Citizen Staff

SILVER POINT -- Its pews may creak and its windows may be cracked, but if the walls at the West End Silver Point Church of Christ could talk, they'd certainly have some stories to tell.

As a young girl, Evelyn Buck remembers the church -- located off Highway 141, several miles west of the



Cookeville city limits -- more as a one-room school house, with a single teacher for the 40-plus students in eight grades. She started her education in the 1930s at the age of 4, thanks to older cousins with whom she tagged along. She can still point to old, weathered trees still standing nearby where she would eat hickory nuts with her classmates, right off the ground during recess. A spring that runs behind the property was their only source of running water -- two children were tasked every morning with making the trip there.

(Pictured: Randy Williams, historic preservation planner with the Upper Cumberland Development

District, and Evelyn Buck, a longtime Silver Point resident, stand outside the West End Silver Point Church of Christ. The former church and schoolhouse is celebrating its 100th anniversary in October. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea).

"We didn't care because we'd play along the way," she says. At one time, there was a college located here -- Southwestern Christian College, which has since moved to Texas. Any remnants of its campus are long gone, and the church is still the only building that remains.

It's no longer active but still serves as a meeting place for community events, funerals and the like. On Oct. 10-11, the 13th annual homecoming reunion will be held on the grounds -- a milestone event this year as the church will be celebrating its 100th anniversary. The homecoming has also become a tradition in its own right. People come from as far away as Texas, California and Michigan to revisit the church, dedicate the cemetery and socialize with family and friends.

"This is always the main event," Buck said. "We'll have about 150 come, even though every year we lose a few. I usually have a house full of people and we just have a good time."

Standing tall

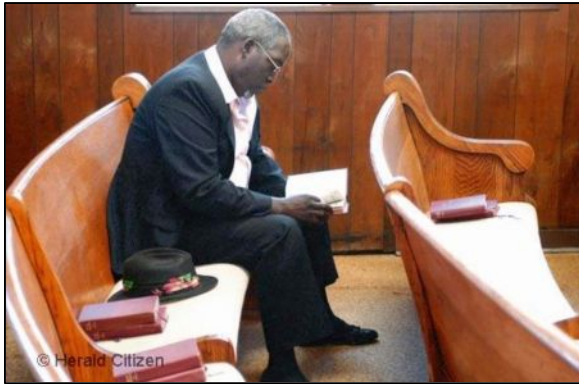
The original West End Silver Point Church of Christ was built in 1909, and in 1915, the current brick church building was constructed, replacing the original frame structure. Inside, a central aisle leads to the snow-white pulpit, which is flanked by hard, wooden pews.

The birth of the church began with the Rev. G.P. Bowser, who had been invited from Nashville to deliver a sermon to the African-American congregation of Laurel Hill Church of Christ. Bowser was recruited by Sam Womack and Alexander Campbell, two of the most noted African-American ministers in Middle Tennessee, to establish a church at Silver Point -- Bowser agreed, provided he was also allowed to establish a school for the African-American children in the area. The Laurel Hill congregation was relocated to the place where the West End Church of Christ now stands.

West End is today considered one of the oldest African-American churches in the region. "School and church were the focal points of the black community," said Randy Williams, a historical preservation

planner for the Upper Cumberland Development District. Williams worked to get the building placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. Its historical and cultural significance to the African-American community in the Upper Cumberland "is without parallel," he wrote in the application form.

"The Upper Cumberland was not a labor-intensive area compared to areas like Murfreesboro and Nashville, so there wasn't a large slave population here," Williams said. "But the region was a slave-holding area, and an African-American population was established on the eastern Highland Rim. So the local population of African-Americans, most that are here today are descendants of the original slaves."



(Pictured: David Gordon reads the Bible during a recent homecoming celebration at the West End Silver Point Church of Christ. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea.

But even with all its history, the church is showing its age. The floor was recently replaced, but the outside brick is worn. Williams is working on a small grant that would repair some of the broken windows.

"It's just cosmetic things and things like that," he said. "It'd be nice to restore it to its original condition, but I don't know if that would be possible or not."

Still a focal point

In many regards, the church was instrumental in the lives of many African-Americans -- part of the reason, Buck said, members still gather each year to remember its past. For years, the church thrived, but slowly its impact on the community faded and the congregation eventually moved elsewhere. Family members moved away.

After graduating from the eighth grade, Buck moved to Cookeville to attend high school at Darwin. She then married and moved to Nashville to raise a family. But in 1979, she came back home, not far from where she grew up. In the winter time, you can see the church from her house.

"For me, this has always been home," Buck said. "There's a lot of sentiment for it. That's why we do this. To try to keep this old building going."

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