

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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178

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Fredonia Church

AND/OR COMMON

Fredonia Methodist Church

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER (South of Mississippi Highway 310,)

Old Union Road (Six miles east of Como)

CITY, TOWN

Como

☒ VICINITY OF

First

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Mississippi

028

Panola

107

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

☐ STRUCTURE

☐ SITE

☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS

☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

☐ UNOCCUPIED

☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED

☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE

☐ MUSEUM

☐ COMMERCIAL

☐ PARK

☐ EDUCATIONAL

☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☐ ENTERTAINMENT

☒ RELIGIOUS

☐ GOVERNMENT

☐ SCIENTIFIC

☐ INDUSTRIAL

☐ TRANSPORTATION

☐ MILITARY

☐ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Trustees of Fredonia Church

STREET & NUMBER

% Mr. W. C. Haley

CITY, TOWN

Como

VICINITY OF

Mississippi

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Panola County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Sardis

STATE

Mississippi

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☐ GOOD
☒ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Fredonia Church is a small frame structure which faces east on a six-acre lot in a virtually unspoiled rural setting approximately six miles east and a half mile south of the town of Como in northeast Panola County, Mississippi. The building combines a Greek Revival temple form with Gothic Revival details in a solidly constructed vernacular architectural statement.

Measuring approximately 40 feet by 50 feet and standing on a low foundation of cement block piers that were originally brick with scored stucco, the church is three bays wide and four bays deep. The gable roof, originally shingled but now covered with sheet tin, extends over the six-foot depth of the portico, where four tapered box columns support the unornamented pediment. Original wooden railings with square balusters enclose the ends of the portico, while the wooden steps which originally extended the full width of the facade have been replaced by concrete steps covering only the center bay. The original sheathing of horizontal flush boards survives on the facade elevation, where it is interrupted only by four tapered pilasters, and by the center doorway with its three-panel oak-grained double doors, square-paned side lights, and lancet-arched transom with mullions in a pattern of overlapping arches. The original clapboard sheathing on the side and rear elevations has been covered with asbestos shingles.

What appear from the exterior to be four tall lancet-arched windows along the side and two along the back, are in fact nine-over-nine double-hung sash windows with pointed-arched stationary transoms. Original six-section louvred blinds fixed on the exterior unify the three parts of each window opening. Two modern brick exterior chimneys placed centrally on the side elevations serve gas heaters that stand about where the original heating stoves probably stood. The remains of two brick interior chimneys that serviced the original stoves survive in the attic.

On the interior, the simple window architraves are punctuated with wooden keystones. The walls are plastered, and local sources say that the ceiling, now covered with narrow beaded boards, was also originally plastered. The original 5-6-inch wooden flooring survives in good condition, and a late nineteenth century brass chandelier which has been converted from gas to electricity hangs from the center of the ceiling. A nine-foot-deep "slave gallery," supported by four tapered box columns that mirror those on the facade, extends along the east wall of the interior behind a solid wooden nine-panel railing, reducing the over-all 14-foot ceiling height to about 7½ feet at the entrance. The gallery can be reached only by means of a steep stair that rises from an exterior opening at the front (east) end of the south elevation. A simple, unpainted plank door covers the opening. Of particular interest on the interior are several pieces of original church furniture, including a low table or altar flanked by matching pulpits or stands, all paneled in a decorative pointed-arched pattern.

Only a small portion of the Fredonia Church property is set aside for the church yard per se, the remainder being devoted to the cemetery, which extends for some distance behind and south of the church and contains some particularly nice examples of mid-nineteenth century funerary design. The grounds are dotted with plant materials that appear to be survivals from the original landscape plan that was formulated by the builder when the church was first constructed.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☒ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☒ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☒ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☒ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1848

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Scott McGehee (?)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fredonia Church is significant as the oldest extant church structure in Panola County, Mississippi, and as a unique reminder of the community spirit of the "hospitable, honorable, and enterprising people" who settled the frontier of north Mississippi after Panola and ten other counties were established on May 9, 1836. Architecturally, it represents an ambitious early effort to inject the aesthetics of architecture into what was still, in the 1840s, a largely rough-hewn frontier. In name and reputation Fredonia symbolizes the unity of spirit that was inherent in the settlement process in north Mississippi; and in physical appearance it provides a visual prologue to the architecture of Panola County as it developed during the succeeding years of growth and prosperity. The fine examples of nineteenth century funerary art that survive in the Fredonia Cemetery give added testimonial to the important position the church occupied in the frontier society that built it.

The first recorded owner of the property on which Fredonia Church stands was a Chickasaw Indian, Ne Tuck E Tubby, who was entitled to a three-section tract of land under the terms of an 1834 treaty between the Chickasaw Tribe and the United States government (Deed book A:78). On April 1, 1836, Ne Tuck E Tubby sold the entire Section 4, Township 7, Range 6 West to the land company of Whitsell, Niles, and Cook (Deed book A:78). In 1839, John T. Murrell acquired the same section of land (Deed book C:464); and on September 30, 1848, Murrell sold six acres of Section 4 to the Trustees of Fredonia Church (six women named), which body still holds title to the property (Deed book G:151).

There has been some speculation in recent years that the present church building may have been constructed as early as 1842, as that date is plainly carved in the northernmost facade pilaster. However, a 1926 newspaper article relates that the Fredonia congregation was organized in 1846 with thirteen members (Wardlaw), and this information is further substantiated by the reminiscences of elderly pioneers published in 1908 and 1909 (Southern Reporter). Local tradition holds that there was at least one previous church building of log construction on the Fredonia Church site, and grave markers in the Fredonia Cemetery date to 1840, indicating that the site was in fact reserved for religious purposes some years before John Murrell officially transferred ownership to the Trustees of Fredonia Church in 1848. But the present church structure, identified by a local resident in 1909 as "the first painted church we had" (Southern Reporter, March 5, 1909), was probably not constructed until 1848, when the trustees acquired title to the property. The all-female membership of the original body of trustees may possibly be explained by a twentieth century reference to Fredonia Church having had its origin in a Ladies' Aid Society (Schoettelkotte).

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8 - Significance

Local tradition in Panola County identifies John Scott McGehee (b. 1788), a native of Wilkes County, Georgia, as the architect and builder of Fredonia Church. Deed and census records show that McGehee purchased several tracts of land in Panola County in 1836 and moved his family there sometime between 1836 and 1838. Reminiscing in 1909 about the history of the area, Captain S. Z. Williamson recalled that John S. McGehee "was the father of the Methodist church in this frontier. . . . Please think of him whenever you look at Fredonia. . . . All this family of McGehees are passed away. Only their lot at Fredonia is left us now to note the home of these noble pioneers--home, church, and county builders" (Southern Reporter, May 7, 1909). A "planting map" made by McGehee for the grounds of Fredonia Church is in the possession of a descendent and lends even further credibility to the association of McGehee with the construction of the church building (statewide survey file). Like his neighbors a farmer by trade, McGehee evidently brought some knowledge of buildings with him when he moved to Panola County. Although a plainly vernacular example, Fredonia is nonetheless a respectable blend of the Greek Revival form and Gothic Revival details that were both popular in American church architecture during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Although predominately Methodist since its construction, Fredonia was originally a union church which serviced Baptists and Presbyterians as well as the Methodists of the sparsely populated vicinity. The very name "Fredonia" is said to have been chosen for the church as a declaration that all denominations were free to worship under its roof. W. H. Alexander recalled in 1908 that ". . . members of the Presbyterian Church, living on the south side of the Tallahatchie [River] used to think nothing of riding all the way from their homes on horseback to Fredonia. . . . There were only a few families of Presbyterians living in the Fredonia neighborhood . . . and as those families had aided in erecting the church building, they naturally felt as if they were entitled to a portion of the time, for services of their own" (Southern Reporter, November 20, 1908).

In 1856 a Presbyterian church was established nearby in the newly founded town of Sardis, and Fredonia became solely a Methodist church, in which capacity it continues today. Mrs. E. H. Rook wrote in 1926 that Fredonia "has always been an active church and has never been without a pastor" (Tate County Democrat). Today the church is serviced by the pastor of the Methodist church in Como; but it has in one sense become a union church again, as citizens of all denominations have joined in a growing local effort to see that the church building is restored

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8 - Significance (continued)

to its original appearance and that the structure and cemetery are preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. The church that stood out so in 1848 as the first painted structure in a newly settled land still occupies a focal position in its predominately rural setting. Fredonia has historical and symbolic significance for the residents of the surrounding area, and it stands as a good example of vernacular church architecture as interpreted by the farmer pioneers of eastern Panola County.

9 - Major Bibliographical References

Rook, Mrs. E. H. Untitled article. Tate County Democrat (Senatobia, Miss.), May 20, 1926.

Schoettelkotte, Mrs. H. J. Undated letter published in unidentified newspaper. Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Statewide Survey of Historic Sites. Panola County. Fredonia Church

Southern Reporter (Sardis, Miss.). "History of Panola County," compiled from reminiscences of oldest citizens. Articles appearing November 13, 1908, through August 13, 1909. Typed copy at Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

United States. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules, Panola County, Mississippi, 1850.

Wardlaw, Mrs. J. B. "History of Panola County." Tate County Democrat (Senatobia, Miss.), May 20, 1926.



FREDONIA CHURCH
Vicinity of Como
Panola County, Mississippi
Elizabeth P. Reynolds
1976

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Mississippi Department of Archives
and History
General view of Church and Cemetery,
looking southwest

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FREDONIA CHURCH
Vicinity of Como
Panola County, Mississippi
Elizabeth P. Reynolds
1976

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Exterior view: facade and south elevations,
looking northwest

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Interior view with original pulpit and
stands, looking southwest

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Mississippi Department of Archives
and History
Cemetery detail, looking west

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