

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Wesson Presbyterian Church

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

Historic and Architectural Resources of Copiah County

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1022 East Railroad Avenue

City or town: Wesson State: Mississippi County: Copiah

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B XC D

	<u>11/24/14</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN/Gothic

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Wesson is a small, quiet community 15 miles south of the county seat of Hazlehurst. Located in downtown Wesson at the corner of East Railroad Avenue and Collier Street, Wesson Presbyterian Church is a one-story T-shaped Gothic Revival style building. The building is composed of wood lapped siding with a beaded bottom edge and a gable roof. Buttresses are on the corners of the buildings, periodically positioned along the sides and also along the rear annex addition. The front façade is centrally pierced with a slightly projecting, buttressed, square tower with hipped roof and octagonal spire. The front of the tower contains one large centrally located arched wood window. The roof is finished with composite shingles and the foundation is made of brick with some concrete. The arched wood window frames are original. The interior of the church has had few alterations since being built in 1877. An annex was added to the rear of the main building in 1948. The church faces west and fronts East Railroad Avenue. The south side faces Collier Street. The church is in a predominantly residential area with historic homes. The original manse is located on the adjacent north side of the subject property. It is privately owned and is no longer part of the church.

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

Narrative Description

Wesson Presbyterian Church is located on the east side of East Railroad Avenue in Wesson in the southernmost portion of Copiah County, Mississippi, which is approximately 50 miles south of Jackson. Built alongside the Illinois Central Railroad line in 1877, the T-shaped Carpenter Gothic church faces west and sits upon a tree-shaded corner lot at the intersection with Collier Street (see Photo 1).

Exterior

The foundation is made of brick piers which are original while the piers for the annex date to 1948 when the church constructed the annex. White painted concrete blocks are set between the brick piers on the north side of the building while white wood lattice is set between the brick piers on the south side. The church is sided with wood clapboard siding except for the annex on the east side of the main building which is comprised of white painted concrete blocks. The original double-hung pointed arch windows are wood, painted white (see Photo 2). The clear glass panes were swapped for pink stained glass in the 1970s (see Photo 3).

A slightly projecting square tower with buttresses is centrally located on the west façade and topped with a hipped roof and an octagonal wood spire. Circular air vents are located on the north, west, and south sides of the tower (see Photo 4). The roof is composite shingled on both the original portion of the building and the annex. A large pointed arch window is located on the tower above the door and below the circular vent.

The main entrance is centrally located in the tower and consists of a two-paneled, double leaf, wood door in a pointed arched opening matching the pattern of the Gothic windows. The area leading to the front door has concrete steps and brick cheeks on each side topped with concrete. Iron railings are located on each side of the concrete steps (see Photo 5). Arched windows flank the tower (see Photo 6). Wood buttresses are located at the corners of the building, on the two projecting edges of the tower (see Photo 7), and periodically along the sides (see Photo 8) and repeated in concrete block on the annex (see Photo 9).

There are four double-hung windows on each of the north and south sides of the building. Originally, there were two windows in the back of the building but when the annex was added, the bottom portion of the two windows were made into doors; however, they still retain the top portion which contains the arch and glass as transoms, although the glass has been painted (see Photo 10). All original windows have pointed-arch upper sash. Each contains four panels on bottom and five on top with wood Y-tracery.

The annex was built on the rear elevation of the building in 1948 and sits perpendicular to the original portion of the building, creating a T-shaped structure. A drop-off at the back of the lot allowed the annex to be built even with the church on the main floor and to have a lower level

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi

County and State

basement with a meeting room and kitchen. It is made of concrete blocks, painted white to match the rest of the church. At each corner of the annex is a buttress made of concrete blocks as well.

There are interior stairs leading from the main floor of the annex to the basement. It contains four sets of paired six-over-six wood double-hung windows on the main level and two sets on the basement level (see Photo 11). The south end of the annex contains one set of windows and the north end contains two single six-over-six windows on top and one set of windows on bottom. An exterior door exists both on the north and south ends of the annex. There is also one located off-center on the east side of the annex. The doors on the south end are four-paneled double leaf doors with glass panes in the two top panels. The door on the north end is a single leaf door matching the ones on the south end.

Interior

The front door opens into a vestibule and lobby that is one-bay deep. A small access panel in the ceiling allows access to the tower and the bell pull. A permanent wood ladder is used to access the bell (see Photo 12). The entryway as well as the rest of the original interior is wood paneled, which appears to have been applied in the around the 1970s when wood paneling was in prevalent use. Three pointed arch wood doors open into the sanctuary. One is in the center and the other two are on each side (see Photo 13).

The flooring in the sanctuary is wood with carpet in some places. The wood floor is original. Lighting consists of two rows of four schoolhouse light globes and one schoolhouse globe located at the front, centrally located (see Photo 14). These are not original to the building; probably added sometime between the 1930s – 1950s. The ceiling consists of modern ceiling tiles. The rest of the building is not air-conditioned, only heated. There are approximately 15 rows of original pews on each side of the sanctuary, forming two side aisles. The pews themselves are divided with a board at the middle to divide the males and females. The pulpit and communion table are original furnishings, as are the chairs and tables.

Entry from the original structure to the annex is gained through one of the two back doors in the sanctuary (see Photo 15). From there, four rooms and a half bath are visible. Stairs (see Photo 16) lead to a basement where there is a meeting room (see Photo 17) and a simple kitchen at one end (see Photo 18). The annex walls are painted gypsum board and the floor is carpeted. George Mercier, a member of the church for 97 years, was invaluable in providing information.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Copiah Co., Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

☐

A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐

B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒

C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐

D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

☒

A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

☐

B. Removed from its original location

☐

C. A birthplace or grave

☐

D. A cemetery

☐

E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure

☐

F. A commemorative property

☐

G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

Period of Significance

1877-1964

Significant Dates

1948

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

n/a

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Wesson Presbyterian Church is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for association with Architecture as a locally significant example of the Gothic Revival style. The church was built in the Gothic Revival style, popular in the 1870s in Mississippi, by one of the owners/managers of the Mississippi Mills, Captain William Oliver.¹ It

¹ McIntire, Carl. "It Looks Like a Church." *Clarion-Ledger, The Weekender*, May 14, 1972.

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi

County and State

has prominent Gothic Revival features and retains a large majority of its original character and materials.

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

Wesson was developed from virgin timberland in the southernmost part of Copiah County close to the Lincoln County line. Colonel James Wesson owned a textile mill in Bankston, Mississippi which was burned during the Civil War. Col. Wesson moved his operation after the war to build a new textile mill in Copiah County. Established in 1866, the Mississippi Manufacturing Company consisted of several brick Italianate buildings, only one of which exists today (NR, 1996).²

Col. Wesson had a sawmill built to provide building materials for the new industry and the homes of operators and employees. He was a Methodist, so the first church built around 1867 in Wesson was the Methodist Church on the corner of West and Main Streets. In May 1885, the building burned and was rebuilt on another lot donated by the Wesson Mills. This second building was dismantled for parts and used for the current building in 1944.³

In 1869, the New Bahalia Baptist Church changed its name to the Baptist Church of Christ in Wesson. It faced Main Street and was built of wood donated by the mills. A new, larger building was constructed one block north of the old one in 1880. This was torn down in 1949 to make way for the current building.⁴

Col. Wesson eventually sold the mills to Captain William Oliver and John T. Hardie in 1871 at which time the mills were renamed "Mississippi Mills". Oliver was a devout Presbyterian and prohibitionist. He organized the Wesson Presbyterian Church December 31, 1871 and work began on the building that same year.⁵

When the mills burned in 1873 and had to be rebuilt, the building of the church was delayed.⁶ The church was not completed until 1877 and was the third church built in Wesson. Captain Oliver's wife, Mary Callaway Oliver, is said to have designed the church in a Christopher Wren style, simple in design with a beautiful steeple and Gothic windows. The octagonal steeple was said to be the tallest in town.⁷

² Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History. "Mississippi Mills Packing and Shipping Rooms, Wesson, Copiah County, Mississippi", National Register Nomination, Nov. 29, 1995.

³ "Religious Principles Important to Founding Fathers of Wesson," *Copiah County Courier*, June 14, 1989, Special edition.

⁴ Williams, Allene. *Centennial of Wesson Presbyterian Church, 1871 - 1971*. No publisher, Oct. 10, 1971.

⁵ Higgs, David, and Walker, Durr. *Wesson: Industrial City of the South*. No publisher, 1994.

⁶ McIntire, Carl. "It Looks Like a Church." *Clarion-Ledger, The Weekender*, May 14, 1972.

⁷ Williams, Allene. *Centennial of Wesson Presbyterian Church, 1871 - 1971*. No publisher, Oct. 10, 1971.

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

The first service in the building was held on March 24, 1878. The ladies of the church contributed to the pulpit furniture, and Mrs. Oliver gave the Communion service. The Presbyterian Church of Henderson, Kentucky sent a Bible in honor of the first permanent supply minister, Reverend Jarleel Woolbridge. This same embossed Bible sits in the front of the church on a table once owned by Captain Oliver. The Bible was stolen in March of 1889 and found in the woods in July of that same year and rebound.⁸

The building was dedicated on October 29, 1879. In 1888, the manse was erected on the northern side of the church and still exists today, although now privately owned. By the end of 1889, membership in the church had reached 215. At this time, the Mississippi Mills employed 1200 people and the population of Wesson was 4000. The mills gave assistance to all seven churches in Wesson in the 1890s. These were the Methodist South, Methodist North, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Catholic, and The Last Chance.⁹

The Gothic Revival wooden vernacular church is the only extant church building from the period of the mills. The Methodist and Baptist church buildings were both torn down to make way for more modern buildings. The Presbyterian Church has retained the most integrity, possibly due to a small congregation throughout the past 100 years.

The Reverend A. W. Duck was pastor for 30 years beginning in 1928. He, along with lifelong member Mr. Wren Story, was the carpenter who built the James S. Rea Annex, completed on September 5, 1948. The last full time pastor was Reverend William H. Mason.¹⁰

Church buildings symbolize a commitment by their congregations to the community and a certain level of permanence within the development of the town. In evaluating churches, it must be determined whether the building is architecturally significant as a well-crafted example of a recognized architectural movement, and, if so, whether it retains sufficient integrity of design and workmanship to accurately convey that significance.

Four factors can be used in making distinctions. They are the age, rarity of the building's architectural form, craftsmanship, and physical integrity. Completed in 1877, Wesson Presbyterian Church is the only extant church built during the days of the Mississippi Mills. The building is a good example of the Gothic Revival style of architecture. The Gothic Revival (and Carpenter Gothic) was prevalent in the United States for design and construction of homes and church buildings beginning in the 1840s and lasting until the early 1940s for churches. General characteristics of this type of construction include steeply pitched roofs and gables, pointed-arch windows with tracery, Gothic transoms above entry doors, one story porches with flattened Gothic arches, and vertical board-and-batten siding.

⁸ Mercier, George. Summary of personal interview with 97 year member. 2010.

⁹ Higgs, David, and Walker, Durr. *Wesson: Industrial City of the South*. No publisher, 1994.

¹⁰ Mercier, George. Summary of personal interview with 97 year member. 2010.

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Copiah Co., Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

Wesson Presbyterian Church exhibits many of the characteristics of the Gothic Revival style including a steeply pitched roof and gables and pointed arch windows with tracery and buttresses. Wesson Presbyterian Church remains a well-preserved local example of the Gothic style executed in wood applied to a small town church.

Another example of a Gothic Revival church in Copiah County is the Carpenter Methodist Church (NR, 1996), built in 1901 in the rural community of Carpenter. The Wesson Presbyterian Church and the Carpenter Methodist Church are both wood-frame, vernacular Gothic-influenced buildings. Both also have a tower and pointed arched windows.

Vernal Presbyterian Church in Greene County, Mississippi (NR, 2002) is another example of a wood Gothic Revival Church which is similar to the Wesson Presbyterian Church. Both churches are wood clap siding, have pointed arch windows, have a centrally located spire with vent, a double-leaf entry, and bell. Vernal Presbyterian was built in 1908.

The main building material of the Wesson Presbyterian Church is wood and it's highly likely the lumber used for the exterior came from the same sawmills used for the mills. The exterior of the Presbyterian Church is similar to both the exterior of the Carpenter Methodist Church and Vernal Presbyterian Church. The brick piers appear to be original and were probably made by one of the bricklayers for the mills. Most Gothic Revival churches built after the 1920s in Mississippi are brick.

The exterior of the original building remains intact except for 1) the annex added perpendicular to the original building in 1948, and 2) the glass panes in the original wood exterior arched windows, having been replaced with pink stained glass in the 1970s. The annex was added in 1948 to provide for Sunday school classes and a dining/meeting room along with a kitchen. The interior of the original portion of the church has changed very little. The walls have brown paneling and the ceiling material is modern. However, no walls have been torn down or added, only the back annex. The original windows and walls along the back where the annex was added were left in place and doors were made from the bottoms of the two exterior windows. Original furnishings still exist such as chairs, a bible and pews.¹¹

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Higgs, David, and Walker, Durr. *Wesson: Industrial City of the South*. No publisher, 1994.

Hodges, Graham. *Old Wesson – Memories of 30 people about Wesson, Miss. and nearby communities*. No publisher, no year.

¹¹ Mercier, George. Summary of personal interview with 97 year member. 2010.

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Copiah Co., Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

McIntire, Carl. "It Looks Like a Church." *Clarion-Ledger, The Weekender*, May 14, 1972.

Mercier, George. Summary of personal interview with 97 year member. 2010.

Millsaps, Lillian. "Wesson, Miss." Paper, Vertical file, J. T. Biggs, Jr., Memorial Library, Crystal Springs, Miss.

Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, Preservation Division. "Wesson Presbyterian Church," SHPO inventory file.

Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History. "Mississippi Mills Packing and Shipping Rooms, Wesson, Copiah County, Mississippi", National Register Nomination, Nov. 29, 1995.

Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History. "Subject File: Wesson Churches" Jackson, Department of Archives and History, 2007.

"Religious Principles Important to Founding Fathers of Wesson," *Copiah County Courier*, June 14, 1989, Special edition.

Smith, Rilla Anderson, Great-Granddaughter of Captain Oliver. Summary compiled by church members from personal interview.

Williams, Allene. *Centennial of Wesson Presbyterian Church, 1871 – 1971*. No publisher, Oct. 10, 1971.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): 029-WES-0003

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 31.698772 Longitude: -90.397156

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

See Continuation Sheet

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting: Northing:

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

Wesson Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

T8N, R8E of Section 4, Town of Wesson

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the lot which the church sits upon at the corner of Collier and East Railroad Streets.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Tricia Nelson
organization: Preservation Consultant
street & number: PO Box 995
city or town: Crystal Springs state: MS zip code: 39059
e-mail: LMNelson10@aol.com
telephone: 601-941-3182
date: August 2, 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer,

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Copiah Co., Mississippi

Name of Property

County and State

photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Wesson Presbyterian Church

City or Vicinity: Wesson

County: Copiah

State: Mississippi

Photographer: Tricia Nelson

Date Photographed: August 2011 and July 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0001
West façade, older photograph, date unknown
- 2 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0002
South façade, detail
- 3 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0003
South façade, overall
- 4 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0004
Southwest view
- 5 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0005
Detail of front entry
- 6 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0006
Detail of exterior of window
- 7 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0007
West façade, detail
- 8 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0008
North façade with annex at rear
- 9 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0009
East façade, annex

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Copiah Co., Mississippi
County and State

Name of Property

- 10 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0010
Original furniture still being used
- 11 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0011
Southeast view with outside entry to annex
- 12 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0012
Ladder leading to bell in tower
- 13 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0013
Sanctuary with original pews, windows and doors
- 14 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0014
Ceiling of original portion
- 15 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0015
Annex, Upstairs
- 16 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0016
Annex stairs, downstairs
- 17 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0017
Annex, downstairs meeting room
- 18 of 18: MS_Copiah Co_Wesson Presbyterian Church_0018
Annex, kitchen

Historic Photographs

- 1 of 1: Wesson Presbyterian Church, photograph, late 1800s; MDAH.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Wesson Presbyterian Church

Name of Property

Copiah County, Mississippi

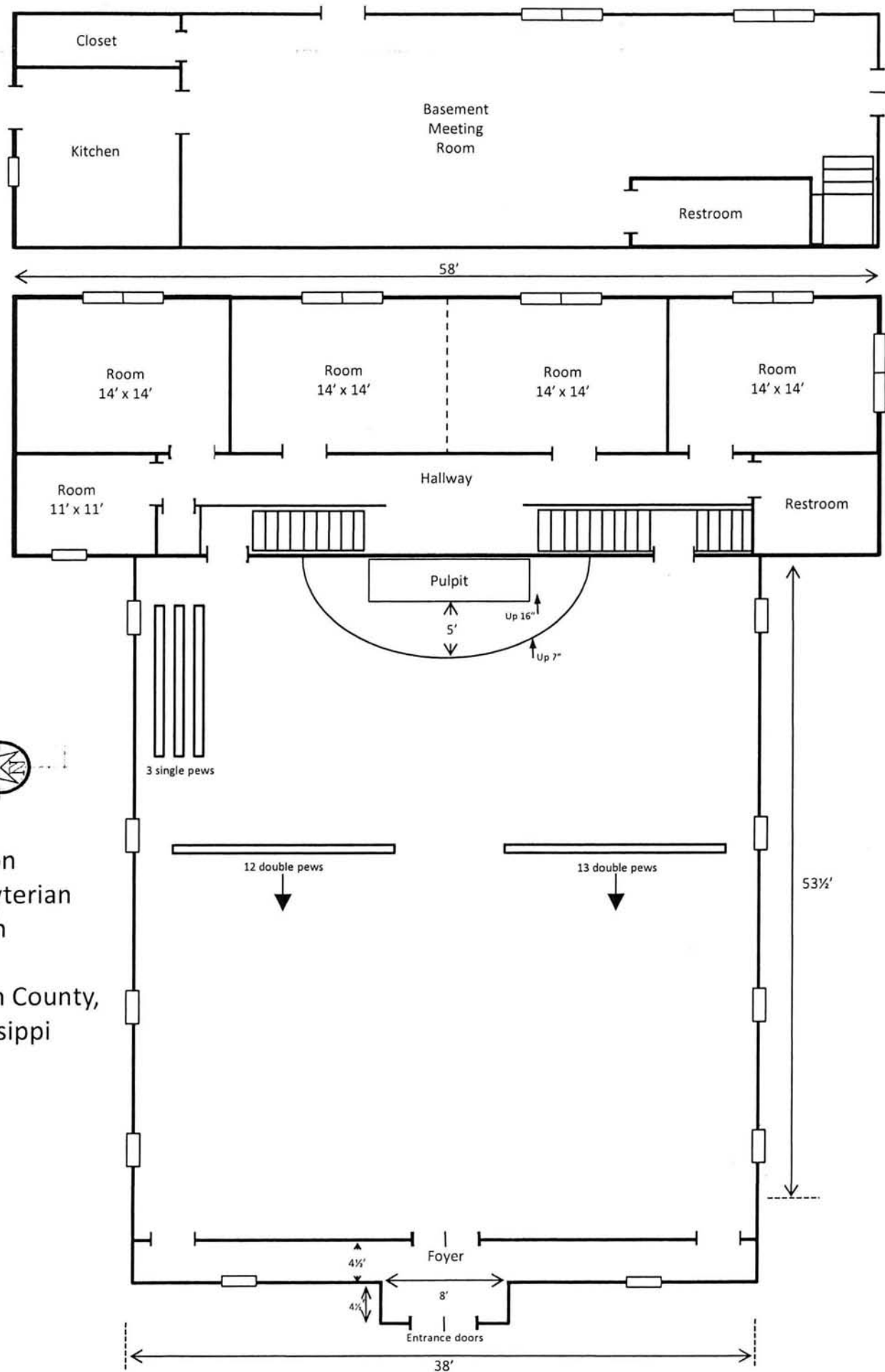
County and State

Historic Resources of Copiah County

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 10 Page 1





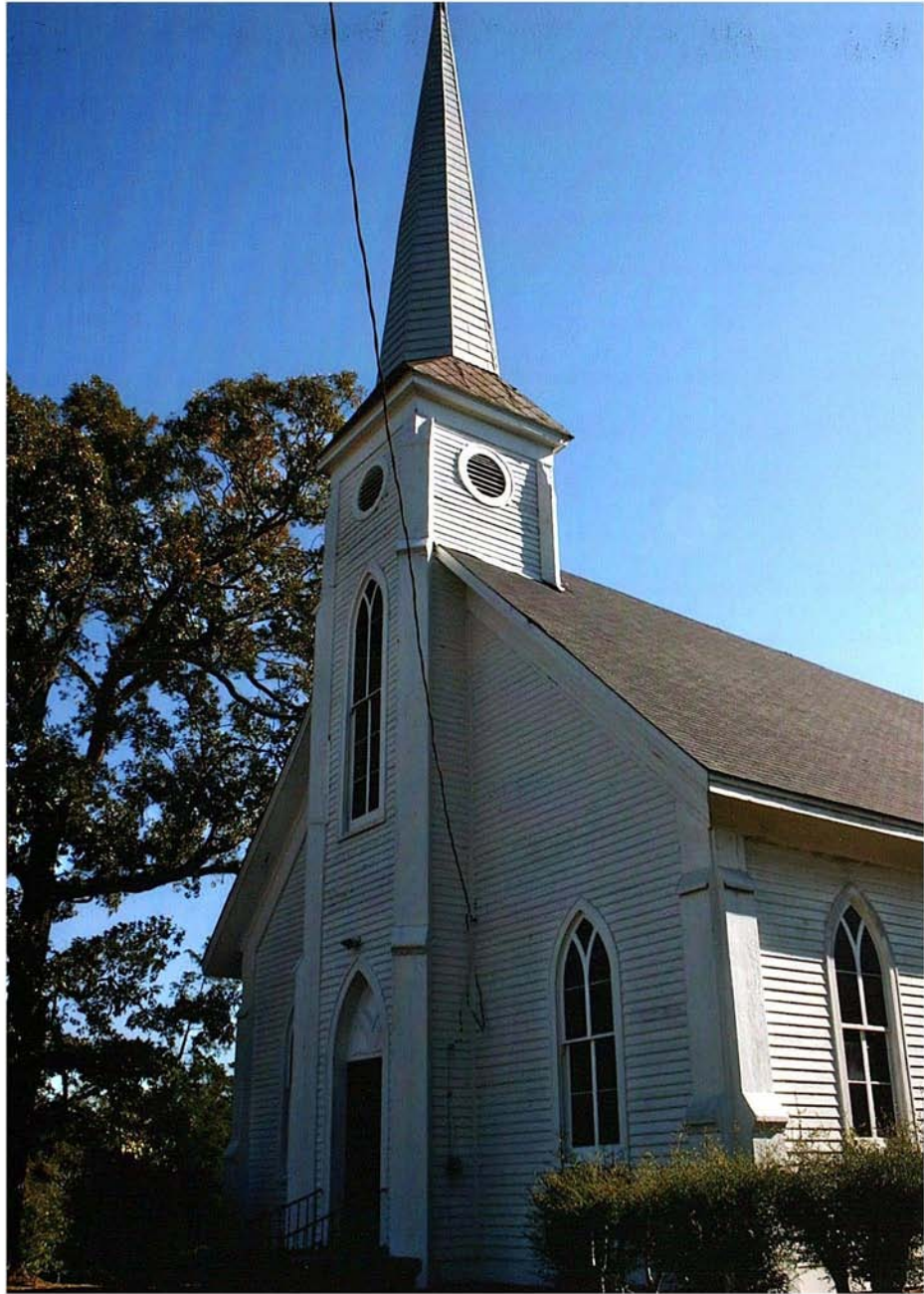
Wesson
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Church

Copiah County,
Mississippi





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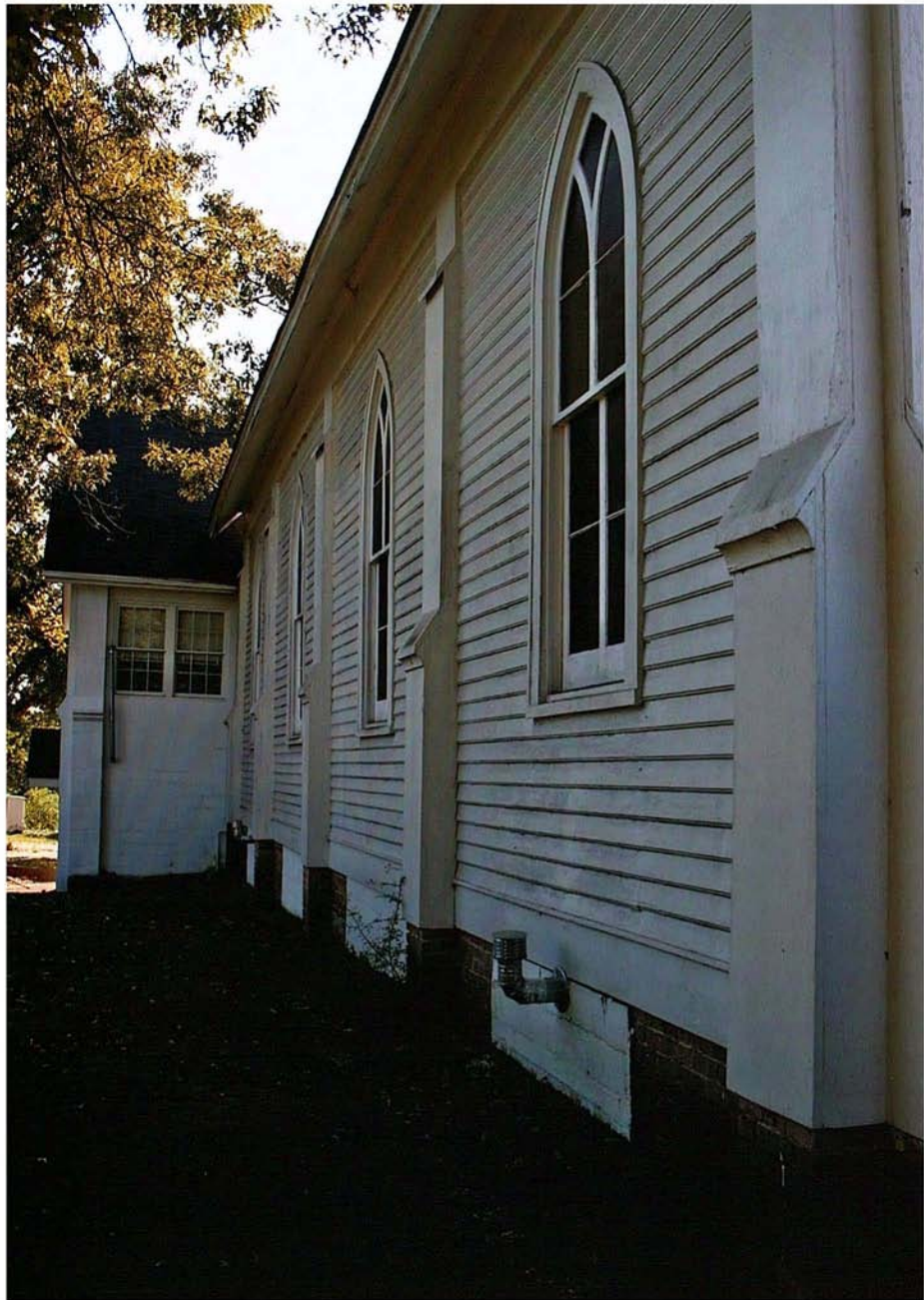
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MS Coplan Co. Wesson Presbyterian Church

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