



Date: 05/16/2019

Staff: Linda Mackey

USN Number: 05901.003448

Name: St. Matthias Church

Location: 2856 Jerusalem Avenue, North Bellmore NY 11793

Resource Status:

1. **Determination:** Eligible
2. **Contributing:** False

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in our history.
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. 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 may lack individual distinction.
- D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Summary Statement:



The St. Matthias Church at 2856 Jerusalem Avenue in the town of Hempstead is significant under Criterion A in the areas of social and ethnic history as a religious building constructed to serve a historical community of color known as The Brush. Settled during the mid-nineteenth century by people of African American and Native American descent, The Brush was located around what is now Oakfield Avenue in a wooded area of pine and scrub oak between the present-day hamlets of North Bellmore and Wantagh. It later became a community composed of blacks and whites living and working together in this area. Constructed in 1904, St. Matthias was built by the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island for a majority-African American congregation; it remained in use as a place of worship and social gatherings for over 100 years. The church is also significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an intact example of a Queen Anne/Shingle-style ecclesiastical structure of modest scale, which reflects popular architectural styles as well as the predominantly rural character of Long Island during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It was the Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, that would settle and name three communities in present day Nassau County (then part of Queens County) based on cities listed in the Bible and located in the Holy Land. As a result, the villages of Jericho, Bethpage and Jerusalem were established. Due to the Friends support of the abolition of slavery, the area became a refuge for freemen. In the nineteenth century, some free people of color on Long Island formed strong neighborhoods on land near European American dominated communities with whom they shared a symbiotic economic and social relationship. In the area known as The Brush, this community formed around the former A.M.E. Church (reportedly burned in the 1890s), and the Oakfield Cemetery (also known as the Old Burying Ground) on Oakfield Avenue, and then the St. Matthias Church.

St. Matthias Church is appreciably setback on a 0.9-acre lot at the southwest corner of Jerusalem and Oakfield Avenues. Mature trees and generous yards surrounding the building promote a sense of contemplative respite in contrast to the busy nearby intersection and shopping centers. The church is a 1.5-story, rectangular-plan wood frame building clad with straight-coursed wood shingles above clapboards; saw tooth shingles are used in the first course directly above the clapboards. The gable front building measures approximately 25 feet wide by 50 feet deep, with a north-south ridgeline and steeply pitched roof covered with asbestos shingle. The underside of prominent eaves feature exposed rafters and beadboard; a section of projecting eaves provide cover for the rear/side entrance porch at the east elevation. The square wood frame belfry is topped with a pyramidal spire and gilt cross; the north and south belfry faces are decorated with sunburst moldings below gabled cornices.

The building retains much of its original fabric including a gray granite cornerstone dated "AD. 1904" located at the northeastern foundation corner. The front-gable end (north elevation) features a large circular diamond-paned window with a stained-glass interior insert. Brick and flagstone steps at the front (north) entrance were repaired ca. 1989, when the old front entry porch was replaced. The front entrance is flanked on each side by a triangular-headed lancet window with textured diamond-paned glass. The rear-gable end (south elevation) features three triangular-headed lancet windows with textured diamond-paned glass below a group of three top-hinged windows with textured diamond-paned glass. Above the rear gable end window grouping, a circular arch is filled-in with diamond-shaped wood shingles. The west elevation has a total of five triangular-headed lancet windows with textured diamond-paned glass, and the east elevation has a total of four of the same windows as well as a rear/side entrance. A brick chimney is sited on the west elevation. The interior appears to be largely intact, featuring a vaulted ceiling with exposed timber scissor trusses and beadboard paneling throughout.

Today, St. Matthias Church is one of the few extant buildings with direct ties to The Brush. Despite suburban development during the 1920s and postwar housing boom, the church withstood threats of redevelopment to remain an active place of worship and community gathering place. Overall, the St. Matthias Church retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.