

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: Friendship CME Church
Other Names/Site Number: N/A
Name of related multiple property listing: N.A

2. Location

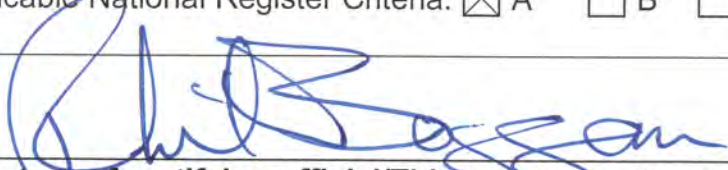
Street & Number: 1055 Friendship Rd
City or town: Lisbon State: Louisiana County: Claiborne
Not for Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets, 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national state local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D


Signature of certifying official/Title: Phil Boggan, State Historic Preservation Officer Date: 4-8-16
Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: _____ Date _____
Title: _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Certification

I hereby certify that the 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.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public – Federal

Category of Property (Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	District
<input type="checkbox"/>	Site
<input type="checkbox"/>	Structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Non-contributing	
1		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1	0	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

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7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.): No style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Brick

walls: Aluminum siding (covers the original wood)

roof: Asphalt shingles

other: N/A

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

The Friendship Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church is located in Lisbon, Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, within a village that has historically been centered on oil and timber. Nestled among the hills of northwestern Claiborne Parish, the church has long been the focal point of the small community of African-Americans. The community itself is Friendship, so named because of the church. Built in 1933, after the previous church building was destroyed by a tornado, the new church was a wooden structure. In 1966, indoor restrooms and a kitchen were added. Aluminum siding was added in 1981 as well as new windows, set within the original window openings, and some interior cosmetic updates including paneling and carpet. The foundation, the height, the length, the width, and the overall form of the Friendship CME Church has remained the same since it was originally. Renovation was primarily done to the interior of the church and was mainly cosmetic. No further renovations to date have taken place since 1981, and its original floor plan from 1933 remains the same.¹ It is easily recognizable to past members of the Claiborne Parish Civic League, those involved in the Claiborne Parish Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, and those who grew up in Friendship. The church retains its historic integrity on both the interior and exterior and remains eligible for listing on the National Register.

Narrative Description

According to the parish tax assessor, the Friendship CME Church was founded between 1900 and 1915.² The original building was located on what is now Allen Road until a tornado ripped through the community and destroyed property including the church in the year 1932. Mr. George Aaron Kinsey, retired Claiborne Parish educator and principal, is a life-long resident at the Friendship Church. He serves as the church steward and oversees much of the church business. He reflected, "The decision was made by the community members to build a new church and place it on the current site. The men of Friendship went about the task of rebuilding and were led in this project and trained in stone masonry by Staton Davis."³ This is how the current Friendship CME Church came to be built in 1933. Adjacent to the church is Friendship Cemetery, which is not part of the nomination.

Façade; Photos 1, 2, 10, and 11

¹ George A. Kinsey. Interview with E. Lewis. October 24, 2015.

² Bob Robinson. History of Property Records. Claiborne Parish Tax Assessor. December 22, 2015.

³ George Aaron Kinsey. Interview with E. Lewis. October 24, 2015.

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The façade of the church faces Friendship Road and features a center entry of double doors. Originally, the church did not have a projecting entry; rather, this was added later so that there was a covered area before entering the church. The central projection has a forward facing gable with exposed rafter tails. The main roof is also a forward facing gable with five decorative eave brackets and exposed rafter tails. A large gable vent is found at the peak of the roof. There is also a small gable vent over the main entry door. The entire building is clad in aluminum siding, which was added directly over the original wood siding (which can be seen in Photo 5 just to the left of the bottom of the handicapped ramp). All of the original 1930s windows were replaced, likely during the 1981 renovations to the building. While the windows were replaced, the window sizes were not altered.

Right Elevation (East), Photos 2, 4, 5

The east elevation features a single window in the entry projection, five windows on the main church, and two windows on the rear addition, which was added in the 1960s prior to the building's use as a Head Start center. There is also a window on the southern side of this rear addition. The roof has exposed rafter tails along this entire elevation as well as on the cross gable of the rear addition. There is a gable vent in the gable end of the rear addition.

Rear Elevation (North), Photos 5, 6, 8

The rear elevation consists of the 1960s addition (added at the beginning of the period of significance) and has two doors, one with an added handicapped ramp, and four windows. All are aluminum. The roof has exposed rafter tails. The rear of the main church's gable roof can be seen in the center of this elevation. A large gable vent is centrally located.

Left Elevation (West), Photos 8, 9, 10

This elevation mirrors that of the east elevation on the main church building. The addition has one window on the south side and no windows on the western side. There is a small gable vent on the rear addition.

Interior, Photos 12-22

The main church's interior received cosmetic updates in 1981 including carpet and wood paneling. However, the layout and size of the sanctuary space, as well as the fenestration pattern of the 10 windows, was not changed. When the rear addition was added c. 1965 (which was required in order to be a head start program as a kitchen and bathrooms was necessary) wrapped the main church and features many of the same cosmetic treatments. 6 large globe lights light the space. Originally, per church members, there were gas lanterns and when electricity came to the church in 1950, these lights were replaced with electric lights. Off of the main sanctuary on the left is a hallway and restroom. Following the hallway to the back of the building into the addition, there is another bathroom and two small closets. A hallway wraps around the back of the building and connects to the kitchen on the right side of the addition.

Integrity and Mitigation of Alterations.

It is clear that the interior of the church has been updated with more modern cosmetic alterations. However, the church itself would still be recognizable to any of the members (some who are still members), Civil Rights activists, and others who came to the church for meetings from 1965-1973. It retains integrity of location, setting, design, feeling, and association. Integrity of design has been affected slightly with the addition of the covered entry foyer, but the design, cladding, and style of this entry is consistent with the simple design of the church. Integrity of materials has been impacted with the 1981 cosmetic alterations, but the integrity of craftsmanship remains intact on the exterior of the building.

Furthermore, as pointed out in Louisiana's "African American Experience in Louisiana" historic context:

Historic resources associated with African Americans can challenge customary notions of integrity. These resources, which are most often nominated for their associative significance (Criterion A or B), have commonly experienced considerable alteration to their physical fabric. Because of legal restrictions on where African Americans could settle and what spaces they could access, those buildings they did control

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were often continually adapted and reworked to serve shifting needs. The longer a resource has been associated with African Americans, the greater the likelihood of its physical alteration..."⁴

The context also states:

"Because of the exceptionally important role of the church as an institution in the black community, an argument can be made for the eligibility of most historic black churches for historical importance as long as they maintain a fair level of integrity and their historic roles can be documented, discussed, and explained in terms of the specific church candidate. The significance of historic African American churches should also be considered in light of the fact that their central role in the community made them a popular target for racial violence. Some buildings did not survive their historic period because of destruction by arson... When considering how such changes may detract from or contribute to the eligibility of a historic African American church, a number of factors should be kept in mind. First, alterations that significantly change the appearance of a building must have occurred within the claimed period of significance for the candidate...When discussing major changes to a building as important parts of its history, it will be helpful to find documentation of how they were perceived at the time of their execution. Often... (it) would have been celebrated with a special event."⁵

The above is true for the Friendship CME Church. The building was not altered at all until 1966, during the period of significance, when, as part of the Civil Rights work in the parish, the congregation was attempting to get a head start program in the community. This required a kitchen and bathrooms, which were added at the rear of the church. The next and only other alterations came in 1981, when a covered entry was added out of necessity of providing protection in the rain for the members and the interior was cosmetically updated. This reflects the patterns discussed in the historic context where money was scarce and when it was available, it was used to improve the church for the members at the time and was looked upon as a positive change for the building.

For these reasons, the church remains eligible for listing on the National Register.

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.)

x	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:

x	A	Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
	B	Removed from its original location

⁴ Laura E. Blokker. "The African American Experience in Louisiana." *Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation*. Web. 4 September 2014, pg 50.

⁵ Ibid, pg. 70, 72.

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	C	A birthplace or grave
	D	A cemetery
	E	A reconstructed building, object, or structure
	F	A commemorative property
x	G	Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.): Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance: 1965-1973

Significant Dates: August 28, 1972

Significant Person (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion D is marked above): N/A

Architect/Builder (last name, first name): Davis, Staten; the men of the Friendship Community

Period of Significance (justification): The period of significance for the Friendship CME Church is 1965-1973 to reflect the years that the Friendship CME Church made its major contributions to the civil rights movement in Claiborne Parish, which began with creation of the Claiborne Parish Civic League and ended with the organization's last major battles with desegregation of local government (police jury), law enforcement, school board, schools, public library and restaurants in the parish.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary): The Friendship CME Church falls under Criterion Consideration A as it is owned by a religious institution. However, the primary significance for the building is not religious. Rather, it is historical for the church's association with the Civil Rights Movement in Claiborne Parish serving as a meeting place and the place where the Claiborne Parish Deacons for Defense chapter was formed.

It also falls under Criterion Consideration G as the period of significance extends to a time that is less than 50 years old. The events that occurred at and were planned at the church during the Claiborne Parish Civil Rights movement during this time help to illustrate the exceptional local significance of this property.

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 Friendship CME Church is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black at the local level based on its history associated with the Civil Rights movement in Claiborne Parish. The period of significance for the church is 1965-1973 to reflect the years that the major contributions to the Claiborne Parish Civil Rights Movement occurred after being planned at the church. The church served as the only house of worship in the parish that opened its doors and welcomed local activists. The church had significant people as its members including Fred Lewis, president of the Claiborne Parish Civic League and the local Deacons of Defense chapter. Mr. Lewis had a significant impact on the community, both within Friendship and parish wide. The church is an important reminder of the Civil Rights movement that took place in Claiborne Parish as well as in north Louisiana. It not only served as an integral meeting place in the parish, but it also was the place where the Deacons for Defense Chapter was created, and was the place where many important Civil Rights events were planned. Listing the property on the National Register will chronicle an important chapter in Claiborne Parish history and will pay homage to the brave people who fought to make better lives a possibility.

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

Brief History of Claiborne Parish

Originally part of Natchitoches Parish and located in north-central Louisiana, Claiborne Parish is named after the first American governor, William C.C. Claiborne. ⁶ The parish became a settlement as a result of the great westward movement of Americans due to the Louisiana Purchase. Those early settlers left the eastern states of South Carolina, North Carolina, and middle Tennessee. As the population in the region grew, new parishes formed from portions of Claiborne Parish. This led to the parish being known as the "Banner Parish of North Louisiana". Those created out of her original territory were Bossier Parish in 1843, Bienville Parish in 1848, Webster Parish in 1871, and portions of Jackson, Red River, and Lincoln Parish in 1845, 1848, and 1873, respectively. ⁷

Early communities that made up Claiborne Parish were Antioch, Arizona, Blackburn, Camp, Colquitt, Gordon, Sharon, and others. Some of those communities that are thriving and active today are Homer (1850), Summerfield (1868), Athens (1888), Junction City (1894), Haynesville (1898), and Lisbon (1850). Homer is the seat of parish government and the location of the Claiborne Parish Courthouse, which was completed in 1861. This striking antebellum courthouse is the only one of the four in Louisiana that continues to serve its purpose (listed on the National Register in 1981). ⁸

Homer has long been the hub of Claiborne Parish where the majority of grocery, retail, and convenience stores are located. It is also the location of the newly-named Claiborne Memorial Medical Center, formerly the Homer Memorial Hospital. Many locals refer to Homer as "town". It is automatically understood that "going to town" means that the individual is going to Homer as opposed to going to any other place in Claiborne Parish.

The recently renovated Claiborne Parish Library is a beautiful structure that provides easy accessibility to the world for the parish residents and visitors. The addition of numerous computers, multi-purpose rooms, and comfortable seating areas provide a vibrant and much-needed meeting space for local organizations. In his July 1966 interview with Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) member and Freedom Rider Miriam Feingold, Claiborne Parish Civic League president Frederick Lewis shared that the desegregation of the Claiborne Parish Library was the first successful integration to occur in Claiborne Parish. ⁹

Haynesville, a neighboring town approximately 13 miles away to the northwest, is another location where residents are able to shop. Much like Homer, it has ample small shops and convenience stores to satisfy most needs. With the exception of these two towns, the opportunity to purchase clothing, groceries, and fast food in Claiborne Parish is very slim.

When industry leaves a community, the citizens must go elsewhere to find jobs. This is the current state of Claiborne Parish. Business has severely declined in the area during the past few years, and this is evident when you drive through the neighborhoods and see the dwindling population. Young families have left the parish to relocate to larger communities such as Minden and Shreveport where they are able to find employment more easily.

Historically, however, this was not the case. The villages of Lisbon and the town of Homer were once thriving, productive communities where families flourished into the mid-1980s. Farming was common, and men were

⁶ *Images of America: Claiborne Parish*. The Herbert S. Ford Memorial Museum, Arcadia Publishing. Charleston, SC, 2008.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frederick Lewis. Interview with Miriam Feingold. Tape Recording. Digital Audio Library. Wisconsin Historical Society. Summer 1966.

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seen plowing their often vast fields with mules as recently as the late 1970s. Tractors, of course, helped to make farming much easier as a number of people were able to afford to purchase useful farming equipment.

During Lisbon's brief history as the "Oil Metropolis of North Louisiana," temporary living quarters for newcomers were set up in the village's water office. Stores and cafés sprang up to furnish supplies and food to the hundreds of people who arrived to work in the fields.¹⁰ In the Friendship Community, an oil plant is located on Adolph Road. This plant has employed numerous men since the late 1950s, circa 1957.¹¹ Oil wells are also peppered throughout the Lisbon area, including locations in Friendship. Employees at the Friendship plant are currently finding themselves being laid off from their jobs, but some remain hopeful that the fickle oil industry will soon be back on course.

Sharecropping was often necessary for many black families in Claiborne Parish during the early to middle 20th Century. This way of living was debilitating for so many because it forced the sharecropper to live in a usually oppressive situation, although slavery had ended. The family living on their white landlord's property was beholden to that landlord. In many instances, there was no freedom of choice, particularly when the voter registration drive headed by the Claiborne Parish Civic League, became a major focus. Black men, women, and their children were often faced with eviction if voter registration advocates visited the homes. The one prevailing opinion is that black landowners had more power within Claiborne Parish than non-landowners did.

The majority of black families living in the Friendship community owned their land since the community's growth very early after the Civil War. The families who have been long-standing land owners include the following: Washington, Penton, Davis, Kinsey, Jones, Frost, Nisley, and Lewis. Reverend Ruth Wilson-Banks, whose mother grew up in Friendship, recalls the stories about land ownership. She stated,

"Based on what I was told, my mother was born in Friendship. When she married my dad, they lived in Lisbon. Friendship was always like home. If you knew anything about Friendship, it was close-knit, very close-knit. They always kept it that way as much as possible. It is said that when they came out of slavery, they were given a certain amount of property, and they were able to build a community just among themselves. They were, and this was told to me by a Caucasian gentleman who went to school with Alonzo Davis, people who were able to survive apart from the help of white people. The Caucasian gentleman could not understand this. He was very curious about Friendship's people. He said that white people, more or less, only delivered the mail to the Friendship post office named Holsey Stop."¹²

This land ownership by Friendship residents continued through the 1960s and 1970s and may have served to further bolster the residents. Willie Curry of Homer and former Friendship resident, Almer James Millage, feel that land ownership during this time by the black families in Friendship empowered the land owners because they were not accountable to white land and property owners like so many African-Americans in other Claiborne Parish communities unfortunately were. Millage spoke recently to family members, former Friendship residents, who were not land and property owners in the community but were instead renting a house from a white landlord. The family told Millage that the landlord warned them to stay out of the "Civil Rights mess". He threatened the family with eviction if they participated in any way. The family opted to live as peaceably as possible in the community, so they did not participate in protests nor did they attend the CPCL meetings held at the Friendship church.¹³

In large part due to its diminished population, the Friendship community now stands in sharp contrast to what it was during the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁰ *Images of America: Claiborne Parish*.

¹¹ Joseph Mitchell. Telephone interview with E. Lewis in Lisbon, Louisiana. February 4, 2016.

¹² Reverend Ruth Wilson-Banks. Telephone interview with E. Lewis from Oakland, California. January 19, 2016.

¹³ Almer Millage. Interview with E. Lewis in Lisbon, Louisiana. September 26, 2015.

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Marjorie Nisley Presley is the granddaughter of Joe Nisley, Sr., who owned the land which became the current site of the Friendship CME Church that was built in 1933. Mrs. Presley, a former Friendship resident who moved to Los Angeles in the early 1950s, reminisced fondly and with a tone of solemn reflection:

“I look upon the community now with a sense of sadness to see so many people gone and the forest and everything have grown up. There are not many people living there as there once were. Back then, everyone knew everyone. We all went to church, and there were no strangers. It was a wonderful place, and I look forward to going back there. But, I do feel a sense of sadness, due to all of the growth of trees... It was, however, a beautiful place.”¹⁴

Mrs. Presley painted a picture of the Friendship community as being a place of like-minded people who farmed together, worked together, played together, and, most importantly, attended church together. Her emphasis was on Friendship being a remarkable community. She continued, “The church was the center, and it was where I got my religion.”¹⁵

In 1976, the Louisiana Historical Association awarded 8th grade Louisiana History student and Friendship resident, Evelyn Lewis, first- place for her essay titled “The History of Friendship Community: A History of a Small Black Community”. The essay discusses various topics that include education, social life, religion, politics, land ownership, civil rights and the influences of Friendship. Those interviewed forty years ago included ministers, educators, and community leaders. Some of those interviewed were very familiar with the origin of the community and the determination of the settlers to maintain their property. The essay includes information about patriarch George W. Davis, an African-American Friendship landowner, who “started buying land in July, 1874, and by 1890 had purchased approximately 440 acres of land.”¹⁶ Davis also applied for and obtained a post office for the community on March 11, 1903. The post office was named Holsey, Louisiana after Bishop Holsey of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁷ Until approximately 1981, Holsey Stop was the rural route for the Friendship community; however, the post office was discontinued after so many families moved away to the cities for better jobs.

The Friendship Community is no longer the energetic neighborhood that it once was, but the few who remain are optimistic that the people of Friendship will not be forgotten and that future generations will know of this rather unique community of black people who were courageous, intelligent, business-minded and loving individuals whose influences stretched far beyond the small community in which they lived.

Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage – Black

The Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana in Brief

**** The following context is taken from the Robert “Bob” Hicks House National Register nomination with minor edits to reflect Claiborne Parish****

To understand the significance of the Friendship CME Church and its connection and association to the Civil Rights Movement, one must revisit the historical background of the Civil Rights Movement in the country as a whole as well as within the state of Louisiana.

¹⁴ Marjorie Nisley Presley. Telephone interview with E. Lewis from Los Angeles, California. February 15, 2016. Presley is the granddaughter of Joe Nisley, Sr., whose land is the location of the current site of the Friendship CME Church.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Evelyn G. Lewis. “The History of Friendship Community: A History of a Small Black Community”. Essay. 1976. This piece is an essay which won an 8th grade writing contest sponsored by the Louisiana Historical Association. The project was presented to Louisiana History classes throughout the state and was in conjunction with the United States Bicentennial celebrations and observances of 1976.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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The genuine reform impulse of Reconstruction was the "first" civil rights movement, as the victorious North attempted to create the conditions whereby African Americans could freely and fully participate in this country as citizens. It was a noble experiment in bi-racial harmony, and, had it succeeded, there probably would have been no need for a "second" civil rights movement. With the end of Reconstruction in 1877, the Federal troops that had been in Louisiana since 1865 now left, leaving African Americans in a state that was set on redeeming the state from the changes of Reconstruction and racial equality. While circumstances in northern Louisiana forced many African Americans to leave the state, the conditions in southern Louisiana were not quite as bad yet. There was certainly plenty of violence, including voter intimidation, and with a new state constitution in 1868, separate facilities and schools were permitted. 22 years later, in 1890, the state legislature passed a law requiring separate accommodations for black and whites on railroad cars. This law came just before the landmark case in 1896 known as *Plessy v. Ferguson*.¹⁸

In 1896 The U. S. Supreme Court upheld legal segregation in the landmark case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, a test case originating in New Orleans, Louisiana. Homer Plessy, a light skinned man, boarded a white railroad car in 1892. He was arrested and his arrest was protested as a violation of his 13th and 14th amendment rights. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the state had not violated his rights. In the meantime, the state of Louisiana passed a law in 1894 requiring separate accommodations in railroad depots as well.¹⁹ The ruling that segregation was constitutional as long as both races were provided equal facilities created the "separate but equal" doctrine.

In Claiborne Parish, as was the case in other parts of America, the "equal" part of the doctrine was not practiced, but clearly understood by blacks and demonstrated by whites. "Unequal" practice was the law of the land and was enforced by the educational systems, governmental and political authorities, and economical sources. The parish's health and medical systems, housing systems, recreational and public accommodations joined in this unconstitutional practice of treating blacks as second class American citizens.

The 1898 state constitution placed further restrictions on African Americans as it throttled their right to vote as well as requiring separate schools for white and blacks. This led to a sharp decline in the number of registered African American voters. Further restrictive laws and bills were passed in the years to come further separating whites and blacks in all aspects of life.²⁰

State Senator William M. Rainach represented Claiborne Parish from 1948-1960, and prior to that, he was the parish's state representative from 1940-1948. A staunch segregationist, Rainach was instrumental in establishing and enforcing the political and social climates of the Northwest Louisiana communities that he represented. William Rainach organized and became the first president of the Louisiana Association of Citizens' Council of America which was a branch of the Citizens' Council, a white supremacist organization concentrated in the South. Senator Rainach and others like him held strong to the Jim Crow Laws of the South and were determined to maintain a society separate for blacks and whites.

Rainach clashed openly with Governor Earl Long over Rainach's attempt to prevent African-Americans from voting in Louisiana, which had been one of the more moderate southern states in its policy toward disenfranchising blacks. Rainach was determined to purge the electoral rolls of all blacks, name by name if necessary through a state law that allowed two registered voters to challenge the validity of any voter—even for misspellings or minor mistakes on their voter registration cards.²¹ After desegregation, Rainach, a very successful businessman, founded the private school Claiborne Academy to ensure that white parents who

¹⁸ Laura E. Blokker. "The African American Experience in Louisiana." *Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation*. Web. 4 September 2014, pg 37-38.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, pg 38; National Register of Historic Places, Robert "Bob" Hicks House, Bogalusa, Washington Parish, Louisiana, #14001174.

²¹ Glen Jeanson and David Lührssen. "Willie Rainach." KnowLA: Encyclopedia of Louisiana. Ed. David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. 8 May 2013. 9 Nov. 2015.

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could afford to pay tuition would not be forced to send their children to school with black students. Claiborne Academy remains an active school in Claiborne Parish today.

A retired African-American Claiborne Parish educator recalled being denied the opportunity to attend services at a Catholic church in Homer, Louisiana, due to what he labeled “the Rainach system”. The man stated that the nearest Catholic Church that welcomed him to worship was located in El Dorado, Arkansas, which is an hour away. The impact of William Rainach and those who shared his views was prevalent throughout Claiborne Parish for decades, and it took a strong and persistent alliance to combat his influences and overturn the policies established and enforced. It was in this setting that the Civil Rights Movement in Homer, Friendship, and Claiborne Parish truly began.

The Influences of the Friendship CME Church, the Claiborne Parish Civic League, and Frederick Douglass Lewis during the Civil Rights Movement

During those years leading up to desegregation, the Claiborne Parish Civic League (CPCL) worked tirelessly in its effort to bring justice and equality into all areas of the parish and the state of Louisiana. Frederick Douglass “Fred” Lewis, the Civic League president at the time, led the cause with tenacity and thoughtful reserve.

Gloria Ford Pitts and her family were active members of the CPCL and residents of the neighboring Liberty Hill Community. As was the case with numerous young people during that time, Gloria participated in peaceful protests and was consequently arrested. When asked about her experience of being in jail, she surprisingly reflected upon it with humor. She commented with a chuckle, “I went to jail and stayed seven days, three hours, and twenty minutes.” Although Ms. Pitts still remembers the exact days, hours, and minutes that she was incarcerated, she commented that she actually enjoyed the experience. She explained her feeling by stating that the purposes of the protests were clear to her, and she understood that they were catalysts for reform which would ultimately make life better for everyone. Pitts’ father, sisters, and some friends were also arrested, thus providing the camaraderie and support in a situation which would have otherwise been terrifying.²²

Ms. Pitts also reflected upon her cousins being called upon by the CPCL to be Claiborne Parish’s version of the Little Rock Nine. Pitts recalled, “My cousins were asked to help integrate Lisbon High School, which was an all-white school in our community.” The Fords had the reputation of being “smart kids”, and they and their parents attended church regularly and were strong community activists. Perhaps, most importantly, their reputations were unsullied. Just as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had done with individuals such as Rosa Parks, the CPCL carefully vetted those individuals whom they considered exceptional candidates to integrate schools and businesses. They wanted their best and brightest representatives. The selection of these individuals served to ensure that there would be no justifiable reason to not admit them. The Ford cousins were among those considered to be prime candidates for the project. They did gain admittance to Lisbon High and attended for a brief period. Eventually, Lisbon High School closed around 1970, and the Ford children transferred to Pineview High School, a Lisbon school with an entirely African-American student demographic.

In approximately 1973, Ms. Pitts and two other ladies, Louise Bursey Lewis and Mattie Gray Howard, were the first three blacks to serve as voting commissioners in Claiborne Parish. Pitts has served as Commissioner in Charge in her precinct for over thirty years, and she credits these achievements to the work of Fred Lewis and the CPCL.

Ms. Pitts refers to Mr. Lewis endearingly as “Papa Fred”. She stated,

²² Gloria Ford Pitts. Interview with E. Lewis. October 14, 2015.

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“Papa Fred approached me to become a commissioner. At first, I was a little hesitant, you know, because of how the whites back then were acting. But then I made up my mind because it was my right as much as their right. This is what we were marching for. So, I just jumped and did it, head first.”²³

Ms. Pitts went on to say that two of her sisters were “firsts” in their respective fields in Claiborne Parish. Donna Ford Robinson became the first African-American secretary at Homer City Hall, and Jessie Ford Washington was the first to work in retail in Homer.

Willie “Hoghead” Curry is a Marine veteran and current Selectman for District 1 in the town of Homer. Curry has been a life-long community leader, activist, and civil rights icon who fondly remembers attending CPCL meetings at the Friendship CME Church during the 1960s and early 1970s. Mr. Curry cites churches with apathetic congregations as being counterproductive and major obstacles to the Movement. There were individuals who were of the opinion that maintaining one’s financial responsibility to the church was sufficient and that in due time, situations would improve.

Curry passionately explained that the Friendship CME Church was the exception.

“Friendship church was the beacon in Claiborne Parish for activity and involvement during the Civil Rights Movement. The people living in Friendship were industrial strength people when it came to commitment to civil rights and human rights...The Friendship people were no-nonsense, and they did not skin and grin in your face. They were honest, and you understood their positions.”²⁴

When asked about the objectives of the CPCL of which Mr. Curry was a member, he opined,

“The Claiborne Parish Civic League from my understanding was not so much concerned about integration as it was about the quality of education. We wanted our black children to be exposed to the same quality of education as other children in the parish. The black kids at Mayfield, Pineview, Athens, and Hillcrest had old, out-of-date, hand me down books from the white schools. There was the foregone conclusion that education was wasted on the black kids.”

Curry noted that the African-American schools had textbooks that were many years old. The students often studied books that were those used by their parents, and in some cases, their grandparents.”²⁵ Mr. Curry described the educational disparity at the time as being “ridiculous”.²⁶

Curry reflected,

“The thrust for my involvement was my little nephew. You see, my sister had a baby boy who was gentle and sweet. He rarely cried and appeared at such a young age to not want to bother anyone. This child was precious to me. As he grew, he wanted very much to go to school. During those early days of his being a student, he enjoyed himself so much. But, things changed. He stopped wanting to go to school because some white folks threw ammonia at the kids as they got off the bus.”²⁷

This disturbing incident was life- changing for Mr. Curry. He sought help and was advised to meet with Fred Lewis and his brothers, George and Otha, who lived in the Friendship community.

When asked about the specific contributions of Fred Lewis, Curry stated, “Mr. Fred Lewis challenged certain issues and took those issues to court...I applaud him for being before his time and quite progressive in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Willie Curry. Interview with E. Lewis in Homer, Louisiana. October 5, 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

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thought, particularly for a man his age. I admired him and his brothers for being older men who were forward thinking.”²⁸

Deacons for Defense, Homer Chapter

Former Friendship Community resident Almer James Millage moved to the Friendship community to live with his maternal grandparents when he was a young child and remained there consistently until he graduated from high school to attend college. He was a teenager during the middle to late 1960s and remembers learning of the Deacons for Defense and Justice during his teenage years:

“The first time I heard about the Deacons for Defense was from Mr. Fred Lewis. He was the pioneer of the Civil Rights era and the guru of the Civil Rights Movement in our area at the time. I was fascinated by those black men arming themselves against attacks from white men. For that period in history, a black man standing up like that was a definite no-no.”²⁹

The CPCL was described as “a weak and timid organization until January 1965, when a small group of men led by Frederick Lewis infused it with a new militancy. Lewis was elected president of the CPCL and would also become the president of the Homer Deacons chapter.”³⁰ Co-founder of the first Deacons chapter in Jonesboro and Claiborne Parish native, Frederick Kirkpatrick, often visited the Friendship CME Church in Lisbon where he worked closely with Frederick Lewis and Fred’s brothers, George and Otha.³¹ Kirkpatrick corresponded with the Lewis brothers even after he had moved to New York City, and he expressed full confidence in their support of his objectives.

In his 1968 letter to George Lewis, Frederick Kirkpatrick wrote:

“Brother George Lewis,

My Dear Friend, what a great pleasure to be with you all. I never feel as good anywhere as I do in you all’s presence, because I know that you all are serious about freedom.”³²

He expressed urgency when he further commented:

“Lisbon is the cradle of Freedom in north Louisiana, and it must lead and lead now.”³³

Mr. Kirkpatrick depended upon the Lewis brothers to disseminate important information related to upcoming meetings and health awareness to the citizens of Claiborne Parish. Kirkpatrick helped in the organization of the Homer Chapter of the Deacons for Defense. Frederick Lewis was the president, and his brother, George, was one of the officers.³⁴ The four north Louisiana chapters in Jonesboro (the founding chapter), Grambling,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Almer James Millage. Interview with E. Lewis. September 26, 2015.

³⁰ Lance Hill. “The Deacons for Defense and Justice: Armed Self-Defense and the Civil Rights Movement.” Diss. Tulane University, December 1997.

³¹ Louisiana eventually had 9 chapters in Jonesboro, Bogalusa, New Orleans, St. Francisville, Minden, Homer, Tallulah, Ferriday, and Grambling.

³² Frederick Kirkpatrick letter to George Lewis written in 1968. At this point, Mr. Kirkpatrick had moved to New York City and was continuing his message of justice, equality, and good health. Being from north Louisiana, he informed Mr. Lewis that he would be visiting soon. Kirkpatrick shared in the letter health tips and the message of freedom that he wanted to be distributed among the members of the black communities in Claiborne Parish.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lance Hill. “The Deacons for Defense and Justice: Armed Self-Defense and the Civil Rights Movement.” Diss. Tulane University, December 1997. In his 1997 dissertation, Ph.D. candidate Lance Hill discussed the creation of the Deacons for Defense Homer Chapter led by Deacons co-founder, Frederick Kirkpatrick. Friendship CME Church members Fred Lewis was elected president, and George Lewis, his brother, was one of the officers.

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Homer, and Minden acted as a regional security, assisting each other with civil rights activities.³⁵

Prior to the formation of the Deacons chapter in Homer, there had been a short-lived chapter of the NAACP in the 1940s reorganized as the CPCL in the 1950s.³⁶ The African-American community in the parish was similar to Jonesboro and Bogalusa, where the first two chapters were created. It had a lumber and munitions plant that employed many in the community. However, as was found throughout the state, segregation was rampant. Frederick Kirkpatrick started to help organize a chapter in Homer in May of 1965. In addition to helping organize the Deacons chapter, Kirkpatrick also brought in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which ran a CORE summer project in Homer. Over the course of the summer, CORE and local activists organized mass meetings, desegregation tests, and nonviolent workshops held at Friendship CME Church and at the Educational Building in Homer (still extant)³⁷. The Deacons' meetings were often held in conjunction with the CPCL's meetings as the members were essentially the same people (and both were headed by Mr. Lewis).³⁸

Another area that the Deacons and CPCL focused on were protests and marches aimed at dismissing unpopular African American educational leaders. At first glance, this may seem like an odd goal for the group to aim for, but according to locals, at least one of these educational leaders would round up black students to work on the property of the white superintendent who required students to mow his yard, plant trees, and other miscellaneous tasks. He (the superintendent) also required teachers and principals to work for him, too. He was able to force students, teachers, and principals to work for him because their education and jobs were at stake if they did not comply. One former teacher (who prefers to remain anonymous), whose husband was responsible for rounding up teachers and students to work at the superintendent's house, stated that the CPCL hoped for the teachers and principals to stand up and tell what was going on, but "...you have to understand that those people needed those jobs. They had families to support. Their contracts were tied to whether they did what the superintendent wanted them to do."³⁹ This was not a problem completely unique to Homer as in nearby Webster Parish, there was a divide among the African-American community whereby the middle class wanted nothing to do with the lower class of African Americans.⁴⁰ This often complicated some of the efforts being made by the Deacons chapters. In Homer, many of the higher up educational leaders were part of this same middle class and the Deacons and CPCL made unseating some of these unpopular leaders one of their missions.

The reception of the Deacons by the local law enforcement was unfriendly when they were first formed. This is evident in one event experienced by Harvey Malray. On June 26, Mr. Malray had been guarding a fish fry at the Masonic Hall in Homer. As he left, a Homer policemen stopped him and told him that it was illegal to walk around with a loaded shotgun. Mr. Malray showed him his Deacons membership card, thinking that would perhaps smooth things over. The office responded by stating the card showed nothing about carrying loaded guns around. Lance Hill writes, "Malray personified the way that the movement changed the black self-image and sense of entitlement. Once the Deacons believed that they had legal authority to exercise their rights, it was difficult for law enforcement to convince them otherwise."⁴¹ Malray was not arrested that night, but on June 29, he was arrested as he guarded the porch of the local freedom house. He was let go after a few days and continued to be active with the Deacons in Homer and Jonesboro.

The Homer Deacons helped to enact change within public accommodations (see the interviews below with CORE and Mr. Fred Lewis) and over time, the relationship between the Deacons and the law enforcement

³⁵ Ibid, pg. 265.

³⁶ Ibid, pg. 271.

³⁷ According to former activists interviewed, other churches would not hold meetings as they were afraid that their churches would be bombed. What set Friendship CME Church apart was that they were not intimidated by the bomb threats.

³⁸ Hill (Dissertation), pg 271-272.

³⁹ Anonymous. Interview with E. Lewis, January 24, 2016.

⁴⁰ Hill (Dissertation). Pg. 266.

⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 274.

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improved. In August of 1967, the CPCL had a march to the local school board and the local law enforcement actually asked if the Deacons would provide members to help the police guard the march.⁴²

On New Year's Eve of 1965, the Deacons from Jonesboro, Minden, Grambling, and Homer organized a night march where they assembled in an empty lot owned by a Deacon. They built an effigy of a Klansman and burned it to the ground. This act showed that the north Louisiana Deacons were confident that they would be left alone and marked a meaningful change in the confidence of African- Americans in the region.⁴³

The Fight for Civil Rights Continues in Claiborne Parish

Miriam Feingold of CORE conducted a series of interviews of civil rights workers in the South during the summer of 1966. Fred Lewis was one of her subjects. Lewis, the oldest of seven children, was born in 1905 and lived in Friendship his entire life. His formal education went no further than the sixth grade; however, he had an unquenchable thirst for learning. Having a heightened awareness and understanding of what was going on around him as a child, he began the interview with a discussion of the impetus for his interest in human and civil rights. At twelve years old, he overheard a conversation between his father and a white man. This conversation set Fred on the path of social activism. He reflected,

“When I was a boy about 12 years of age, a white man was talking to my father in his yard. He related to my father that he had to go to Lisbon to vote. He reminded my father that he (Lewis’ father) couldn’t vote. I thought that my father could do anything in the world that anyone else could do. That was the only thing that attracted my attention... And at that age, it never did leave me. And I vowed right then, at the age of twelve, that if I ever got a chance, I was going to hit this thing a blow.”⁴⁴

Undaunted by efforts at intimidation by segregationists as well as apathy from some African-Americans in the parish, the Claiborne Parish Civic League led by Frederick Lewis went forward with the voter registration drive and the integration of businesses and schools .Lewis stated,

“Since that day, January 10, I have had constant conferences in Washington at the Justice Department and the Office of Equal Opportunity. Last year, they said that I was solely responsible for getting Head Start...In January 1965, I met with the Ways and Means Committee to get the program down here. Prior to that time (April 28, 1965), we went to the school board and asked the superintendent for help. He failed to give it to us. He said he wasn’t going to integrate. We then asked our professional people in the parish for help. I knew that I did not have the ability to file applications, make out the budget and everything like that. What really happened was this. When they failed to do so, we called in CORE. CORE came. We had opposition, too. We debated and put the pressure on so heavy that we voted unanimously to bring in CORE. We give CORE credit. The first lady to work with us through this was Judith Rawlings from Massachusetts. Finally, Willie Ellis came. He was the mastermind.”⁴⁵

The Claiborne Parish Civic League became aware of its need to have a chartered organization in place to not only sponsor a Head Start Program but to also challenge the police jury and school board. In his interview with Feingold, Lewis discussed a charter which was acquired that helped the CPCL in its effort to move forward with litigation. He said that in 1965 the organization, which was named the Claiborne Parish Economic and Social Opportunity, Incorporated, was chartered.⁴⁶ Now, the Claiborne Parish Civic League could begin a more organized and strategic approach in aggressively challenging local government in its deliberate refusal to comply with national civil rights legislation such as Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Lewis told Feingold that the Head Start Program

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, pg. 275.

⁴⁴ Frederick Lewis. Interview with Miriam Feingold. Tape Recording. Digital Library. Wisconsin Historical Society. Summer 1966.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid

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was not in place on the date of the interview, due to “all of the challenges by the white people”.⁴⁷ He hoped that by October 31, 1966, Head Start would be launched in the parish.⁴⁸ According to George A. Kinsey, church steward, the Head Start Program was launched in Claiborne Parish at the Friendship CME Church in or around 1966.

Lewis went on to say that the first successful integration in the parish was that of the Claiborne Parish Library in 1965. Tests, which were similar to sit-ins but did not involve forcible removal, were begun in May of 1965. Four eateries named the Majestic, Purple Cow, Steak House, and one whose name Lewis was unable to recall were successfully integrated: however, this was short-lived. The restaurants began to resume not serving African-Americans until they went to the back of the restaurants. Lewis recalled an action taken a week before the interview:

“Three of us, two of my brothers and myself, went to the Majestic last fall, but they failed to serve us. If we wanted to be served, we had to go to the back. A day or two earlier, they hired a woman because she knew us. But, when she returned to work the next morning, she was relieved of her job.”⁴⁹

The consensus is that the greatest accomplishment of the Claiborne Parish Civic League is its voter registration drive. The December 16, 1964, Information Letter from CORE indicates that Claiborne Parish had a “Negro Population” of 9,755 with 96 registered to vote. (The “White Population” was 9,646 with 5,229 registered to vote.)⁵⁰ In some instances, those who registered to vote faced hostile employers who threatened the employment of blacks who had registered to vote. Joseph Mitchell recalled his brother being told by a white school board member that he (the employee) “will never work in Claiborne Parish while I am on the board.”⁵¹ There is no record of Mitchell’s brother seeking assistance from the Claiborne Parish Civic League or any recourse sought by him concerning the school board member’s remark. Instead, the employee chose to quietly relocate to another community where he continued his career as an educator and retired after 30 or more years of service.

Claiborne Parish resident and former Haynesville mayor Sherman Brown spoke of an occasion in 1972 when the Claiborne Parish School superintendent at the time refused to allow him employment at a local high school where the majority of students were Caucasian. The superintendent matter-of-factly told Brown that he would be given the opportunity to work in one of the black high schools, but the request to work at the preferred school was not negotiable. With the support and encouragement of two African-Americans from his community, who were a principal and a school board member, the appointment of a new superintendent, and the efforts of the CPCL, Brown was hired a year or two later at the school of his choice. Ironically, he also became the first African-American to serve as Claiborne Parish Superintendent of Schools.⁵² In a letter to the author, Mr. Brown spoke of his work experiences in Claiborne Parish throughout the years. He wrote,

“Because of the unwavering diligence of Mr. Lewis and a few others, I went on to become a central office supervisor, high school principal, first system assistant superintendent and eventually a stint as superintendent of the school system. After retirement from the system, I ran and was elected a member of the school board. I later resigned from the board after being named mayor of my hometown. If not for the tenacity of prominent citizens like Mr. Fred Lewis during that era, I honestly do not think the culture

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ CORE Information Letter. Voter Registration Update. December 16, 1964

⁵¹ Joseph Mitchell. Interview with E. Lewis. September 23, 2015. Mitchell recalled his brother’s experience as a Claiborne Parish teacher who had registered to vote. A member of the school board is said to have expressed disdain for the educator being a registered voter.

⁵² Sherman Brown. Interview with E. Lewis. September 19, 2015 and Personal Letter from Brown. October 5, 2015

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of our parish would have changed as rapidly as it did to allow me the opportunities I've been blessed to have. " 53

The CPCL recognized policy changes occurring locally and nationally. The members knew that these changes were happening at a snail's pace; however, advancements were nevertheless being made. The unrelenting, conscientious effort of the Claiborne Parish Civic League was making a difference. In August 1972, Mr. Lewis, as president of the Claiborne Parish Civic League, brought an action in United States District Court, Western District of Louisiana challenging the constitutionality of the apportionment of the Claiborne Parish Police Jury and Claiborne Parish School Board which would affect an unfavorable voting outcome of an election. The court declared that the police jury and school board of Claiborne Parish were mal-apportioned in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. 54 By April 1973, three African-Americans, including Frederick Lewis, were elected to the Claiborne Parish School Board. Two were elected to the Police Jury.

A program was held at the Friendship CME Church on Sunday, April 22, 1973, to honor newly-elected school board members Mrs. Lafaye C. Jackson, Mr. A.J. Coleman, and Mr. Frederick Lewis. Newly-elected police jury members who were honored were Mr. Murray J. Powell and Mr. Joe Sturges.

African-American leadership and representation within Claiborne Parish have seen marked growth in the more than thirty years since the end of the Civic League and Frederick Lewis' death. Thus far, there have been three African-American mayors - two in Homer and one in Haynesville. Numerous individuals have served as members of the school board. The Claiborne Parish School Board has hired a number of black school administrators. Two have served as superintendent of schools. African-Americans currently serve on the local police jury and town council.

The current state representative for the district is Mr. Patrick O'Neal Jefferson. Jefferson, an attorney, holds degrees from Dillard University and Ohio State University College of Law. Ironically, he represents the same parishes once represented by William M. Rainach.

Conclusion

As discussed above, the Friendship CME Church played a major role during the Civil Rights Movement. It was one of two regular meeting places for the local civil rights organization, the Claiborne Parish Civic League. It was the only church building in the parish where the organization held meetings from January 1965 until 1973. The other meeting place of the CPCL during those years was the Friendship Missionary and Educational Association Building, which is located at 299 Washington Street in Homer, Louisiana.⁵⁵ While both buildings still stand today, the Friendship CME Church was the official meeting place of the Claiborne Parish Civic League (CPCL). Additionally, it was the home church of the late Frederick Douglass Lewis, the organization's venerable president. By all accounts, the Friendship CME Church played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement. The plans affecting growth and change in Claiborne Parish were envisioned, created, and put forth during the sessions held at the church.

During the Civil Rights period of the 1960s and early 1970s, the church's pastor was the compassionate and out-spoken Reverend C.L. Jones. In January of 1965, Frederick Douglass Lewis was drafted as the new

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ **Findings of Facts and Conclusions of Law.** *Claiborne Parish Civic League ET AL Versus The Claiborne Parish School Board ET AL*. United States District Court Western District of Louisiana 28 Aug. 1972. National Archives of Fort Worth. Print. 26 October 2015.

⁵⁵ The Educational Building was called "Friendship Missionary and Educational Association Building," which is interesting because it was not located within the Friendship community. (See Figure 2 for an image of this building.) Today, it is used for church conferences and meetings of the local NAACP chapter, and has been used for various meetings over the years. Today it is known as the "Baptist Association Building." While the building is extant, this does not diminish the role of Friendship CME Church during the Civil Rights movement in Claiborne Parish. Both were important buildings during the movement. It is likely that the Educational Building could also be eligible for National Register listing if desirable.

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president of the Claiborne Parish Civic League, an organization that served the same purpose as the NAACP but did not share its national fame. The Friendship CME Church was the only church in Claiborne Parish to serve as the meeting place for the Civic League largely because the members of the other black churches and their pastors were afraid that their buildings would be destroyed by the prolific bombings of segregationist groups that were rampant, particularly in the South.⁵⁶ One incident in particular happened on a cold, rainy night in December of 1963 when the Friendship CME Church was the site of a cross burning. Around that time, the neighboring Antioch Baptist Church was burned down; however, the members of Friendship were not intimidated by the events. The CPCL meetings continued to be held at the church.⁵⁷

Another matter of concern for many, particularly middle-class blacks, was the fear of job termination. A large number of principals and teachers employed by the local school board were reluctant and often refused to affiliate themselves with civil rights organizations because they feared retribution from their white employers. As members of the middle-class, these individuals lived rather comfortably in nice homes; they often drove new automobiles, and their children benefited from certain privileges not experienced by the parents. Protests and forced integration were concepts which were frequently rejected by this demographic because they were complacent with the lives they were living and they, in no way, wanted this to be jeopardized.

The Friendship CME Church is described as being the “beacon” of the parish because its church members, some of whom were also the black middle-class, and the Friendship community at large, were known for their fortitude and sheer courage during those turbulent and unpredictable times of racial strife. The events that occurred at and that were planned at Friendship CME Church between 1965 and 1973 were vitally important to the ethnic heritage of blacks in Friendship, Homer, and Claiborne Parish as a whole.

Developmental History/Additional historic context information

One interesting story that relates to the history of the Civil Rights movement in Claiborne Parish, but that isn't directly tied to the Friendship CME church is documented in the *Louisiana Corelator* from November 1, 1966. The article is titled “Federal Court Asked to Stop Trials of Negro Parents,” and discusses how a suit was filed in New Orleans asking that the federal court prohibit the prosecution of 13 African Americans who were involved in a recent school boycott in Claiborne Parish. The suit named the governor, attorney general, and district attorneys of Claiborne and Plaquemines Parish and was filed by the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee. It claimed

“that the governor and his subordinate prosecuting officers are guilty of discriminatory enforcement of Louisiana's mandatory school attendance law by instituting the prosecution of Negroes in Claiborne Parish school boycott, but refusing to prosecute whites who have been openly boycotting Plaquemines Parish schools since another federal court ordered them desegregated.”⁵⁸

There was a total boycott by white parents in Plaquemines Parish after the federal court desegregation ruling and the parish district attorney stated that the order was equal to the recent Hurricane Betsy and that he wouldn't enforce the state law against parents who kept their children out of school. The governor also stated that he would not get involved in the enforcement of that same law against white parents who encouraged the school boycott. However, in Claiborne Parish, black parents who kept their children out of the all black Pineview School in protest of the firing of a janitor by the school for his civil rights activities and general poor conditions at the school, were brought to trial. The article states that the federal court was asked to declare the prosecution of the black parents as discriminatory application of the state's attendance laws.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Gloria Ford Pitts. Interview with E. Lewis. January 14, 2016.

⁵⁷ George A. Kinsey and Dorothy Washington. Interviews with E. Lewis. October 24, 2015 and November 5, 2015 respectively.

⁵⁸ “Federal Court Asked to Stop Trials of Negro Parents.” *Louisiana Corelator*. November 1, 1966.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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This article provides some interesting background info to drive home why the Claiborne Parish Civic League, the Homer Chapter of the Deacons for Defense, and Mr. Fred Lewis were so instrumental in change in the parish.

2. Major Bibliographical Resources

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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
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

3. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1.3 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 32.856330 | Longitude: -92.876986 |
| 2. Latitude: 32.856218 | Longitude: -92.876316 |
| 3. Latitude: 32.855405 | Longitude: -92.876585 |
| 4. Latitude: 32.855538 | Longitude: -92.877194 |

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

Friendship CME Church

Name of Property

Claiborne Parish, Louisiana

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The Friendship CME Church is located at Section 34; Township 22; Range 5; Area 641.50 as indicated on the parish plat map. 4 AC. IN SE COR. N ½ SW ¼ NW ¼, SEC. 34/22/5. This totals 2.6 acres. The church property totals about half of the overall acreage (the adjacent cemetery the other half).

This includes both the church and the adjoining cemetery. Only the church acreage is part of this nomination. See submitted boundary map for further information.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries chosen include the church (not the adjacent cemetery) and reflect the historic boundaries of the church building as the church itself is what is contributing and relates to the overall significance argument under Criterion A.

4. Form Prepared By

name/title: Evelyn G. Lewis

organization: The Friendship Community

street & number: 789 Friendship Road

city or town: Lisbon

state: Louisiana

zip code: 71048

e-mail: freckles614@hughes.net

telephone: 318-353-6689

date: April 2016

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 3000x2000 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, 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: Friendship CME Church

City or Vicinity: Lisbon

County: Claiborne Parish

State: Louisiana

Name of Photographer: Jessica Richardson

Friendship CME Church

Name of Property

Claiborne Parish, Louisiana

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Date of Photographs: March 31, 2016

- 1 of 22: Façade; camera facing northeast.
- 2 of 22: Façade and east elevation; camera facing north.
- 3 of 22: View of Friendship cemetery; camera facing east.
- 4 of 22: Eastern elevation; camera facing northwest.
- 5 of 22: Rear and eastern elevation; camera facing southwest.
- 6 of 22: Rear elevation; camera facing southwest.
- 7 of 22: View of Friendship Cemetery from rear of church; camera facing southeast.
- 8 of 22: Rear and western elevation; camera facing south.
- 9 of 22: Western elevation; camera facing southeast.
- 10 of 22: Western elevation and façade; camera facing northeast.
- 11 of 22: View of church and cemetery from Friendship Road; camera facing east.
- 12 of 22: Main entry; camera facing northwest.
- 13 of 22: Main entry; camera facing southeast.
- 14 of 22: Sanctuary; camera facing northeast.
- 15 of 22: View from sanctuary towards rear hall on western side; camera facing northeast.
- 16 of 22: Sanctuary; camera facing southwest.
- 17 of 22: View from sanctuary towards rear hall on eastern side; camera facing northeast.
- 18 of 22: View of kitchen in rear addition; camera facing south.
- 19 of 22: View of rear hall; camera facing northwest.
- 20 of 22: View of bathroom and rear hall on western side; camera facing west.
- 21 of 22: View of rear hall looking towards sanctuary in rear addition; camera facing southwest.
- 22 of 22: View of rear hall looking towards sanctuary; camera facing southwest.

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Figure 1. Friendship Missionary and Educational Association Building located in Homer, LA. This building held some of the meetings of the Claiborne Parish Civil League when they weren't being held at Friendship CME Church. Image courtesy of the author.



Figure 2. Frederick Lewis standing in front of Pineview High School on May 18, 1980. Lewis was the president of both the Claiborne Parish Civic League and the Homer Deacons for Defense. He was elected to the Claiborne Parish School Board in 1973 and served until his death on May 16, 1984. Image courtesy of the author.

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Figure 3. Pictured, left to right, Gloria Pitts, Louise B. Lewis, and Mattie Howard on Sunday, February 21, 2016. These three ladies are the first African-Americans to work as voting commissioners in Claiborne Parish. Image courtesy of the author.



Figure 4. Scene of the American Civil Rights Movement in Minden, Louisiana on August 7, 1965. (Foreground on the left: CORE co-founder, James Farmer. Claiborne Parish Civic League member, George Dodd, is to the right of Farmer in the dark sunglasses.) Image courtesy of Louis McCoy.

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Figure 5. From the left, an unidentified man with the Lewis brothers, Fred, Otha, and George (circa 1974). The brothers were close associates of Jonesboro Deacons for Defense co-founder Frederick Kirkpatrick and were instrumental in helping to launch the Homer Deacons for Defense and rejuvenating the Claiborne Parish Civic League in 1965. Image courtesy of the author.



Figure 6. An interior view of the Claiborne Parish Library (circa 1947). The library was the first establishment to be successfully integrated in Claiborne Parish. This took place in 1965. Image courtesy of Pam Suggs.

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Figure 7. Louisiana Historical Association president, Dr. Morgan Peoples, and first-place essay contest winner, Evelyn Lewis in 1976. Friendship resident and Pineview High School 8th grader Evelyn Lewis receives a plaque and check for her winning essay titled “The History of Friendship Community: A History of a Small Black Community” Image from the LHA Newsletter, July 1976.

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.