

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Handy Chapel
other names/site number Wright Chapel / 5ME.4157

2. Location

street & number 202 White Avenue not for publication
city or town Grand Junction vicinity
state Colorado code CO county Mesa code 077 zip code 81501

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 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

<p>I hereby certify that the property is:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____</p>	<p>Signature of the Keeper</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Date of Action</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Handy Chapel
Name of Property

Mesa County, Colorado
County and State

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

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

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

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

NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION - Religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION - Religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th & EARLY 20th CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Stucco

roof Asphalt

other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Handy Chapel
Name of Property

Mesa County, Colorado
County and State

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.)

- 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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE - Black
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1892 - 1944

Significant Dates

1892

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Hunt McDonald & Company

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Josephine Dickey, Personal Files

Handy Chapel
Name of Property

Mesa County, Colorado
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	2
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7	1	0	3	3	0
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4	3	2	7	1	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

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Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Juanita M. Moston, Historian / Kristen K. Ashbeck, Planner

organization Mesa Co Historical Society/City Community Dev date March 1994

street & number 641 Starlight Drive/250 N. 5th Street telephone (303) 434-0953 / 244-1437

city or town Grand Junction state CO zip code 81504 / 81501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Handy Chapel c/o Harry Butler

street & number 1616 North 5th Street telephone _____

city or town Grand Junction state CO zip code 81501

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form, including suggestions for reducing the burden, should be sent to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Page 1

Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

DESCRIPTION

The Handy Chapel, constructed in 1892, is located on the northeast corner of White Avenue and Second Street in downtown Grand Junction. Next door, there is a turn-of-the-century vernacular wood-frame house that also belongs to the church. Both buildings are sited on the lots originally deeded to the black community by the Grand Junction Town Company. The setting is residential in character, with shrubs and grass in the front yard and large shade trees and grass in the large rear yard (see attached Sketch Map).

The main body of the present chapel is a rectangular plan with front gable roof. It is a simple structure with an absence of architectural features and ornamentation that can distinguish a more specific style. The rear portion of the rectangle was added and then changed to its present design, while the front portion was part of the original structure. There is a gabled ell and a flat-roofed room on the east side—the gabled portion being part of the original construction and flat-roofed portion being a later addition. The attached Site Plan depicts this phased construction. The dates of these changes and additions are unknown but they appear to have been constructed shortly after the original east-west rectangular chapel was completed as it already appears as it does today in a turn-of-the-century photograph (refer to Photo 1). There is a two story-bell tower on the southwest corner of the main gable (Photo 2). The roof has narrow eaves with no ornamentation (Photo 3).

The building was originally of brick construction on a stone foundation (Photo 1). The masonry walls have been covered with a white stucco coating (date unknown). The roof on the bell tower and the main gabled roofs have asphalt shingles. The lower portion of the tower has shake shingles and, although the upper portion is open on all four sides, there is no bell visible in the tower.

The changes that have been made to the building over time actually reflect its perhaps more important use as a refuge to the homeless and in need during its 100 year history. As people came through or to the community in need of work or a roof over their heads, the Handy Chapel temporarily provided both. Men in need of a place to stay or some other help did work on the chapel in exchange. Most of the remodel work that has been done on the building, as well as much of the ongoing maintenance required for the building was and continues to be accomplished in this manner.

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The main chapel entrance is on the south-facing facade with a low stoop at the doorway (Photo 4). A cover above this entry was added at some point and then removed again in the early 1980s at about the same time a handicap access ramp was installed at the main entry. The doorway has a single wood panel door with a segmentally arched opening. There is one other entrance and three windows on this facade that appear to be original openings as they all are similar in their narrow, rectangular dimensions and have similar details with stone sills and segmentally arched openings (Photo 5). The west-facing facade has four, one-over-one narrow rectangular windows that are evenly spaced between shallow buttresses (Photo 6). The buttresses were added sometime in the 1940s or 50s to add support to the roof. The rear and east-facing facades of the chapel are even more simple with few windows and other openings of a functional nature (Photos 7 and 8). Some lean-to rooms have been added to the rear of the chapel over the years (Photo 7). While these additions do not add to the visual quality of the building, they do not detract from the architectural integrity of the Chapel. The lean-to rooms could be easily removed from the site if no longer needed for storage or other purposes.

The interior features of the chapel reflect the same simple nature of this vernacular structure. The chapel is basically one large open room with a central aisle between the theater style seating (Photo 9). At the front of the room, the pulpit is set in the center of a raised platform. The walls and ceiling have a smooth plaster finish. The original woodwork around the windows and doors is intact but it has been painted (Photo 10). Aside from the wooden floor that has been carpeted, the interior appears much as it did over 100 years ago. The eastern wing of the building includes a multipurpose room (gabled roof area) and a one-room living quarters (flat-roofed area). Historically, these rooms were used for similar purposes to support the function of the Chapel itself. The gabled roof area was originally constructed as a parsonage and is still used as such to prepare for services. The living quarters were constructed to be used by a visiting pastor during times when the Chapel did not have its own. Today it is used as a place to house someone in need of a roof over their head. Although the floors have been carpeted, the original brick walls and wooden details of the structure are exposed (Photos 11 and 12).

The adjacent chapel house was constructed in 1915 to provide an additional means for the chapel to serve visitors and families of the community when in need of a place to stay. The house is a simple wooden vernacular structure with little ornamentation. The main part of the

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

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house is a rectangle built on a concrete foundation with an enclosed porch offset at the front entry. The house has a steeply pitched roof with wooden shake shingles. The porch also has a gable roof with shake shingles but it is not as steeply pitched as that on the house. Both the house and porch have wooden weatherboard cladding. The south-facing front facade has a single rectangular window (Photo 13). The porch has a band of windows across the front. The east-facing (side) has three rectangular wooden windows that are symmetrically spaced. Each window has a wooden pediment detail above (Photo 14). The north-facing (rear) facade has a doorway with a two-step concrete stoop and one rectangular window (Photo 15). The west-facing side has a small, lean-to addition with a door on its north side and a single rectangular window (Photo 16). All of the windows are tall and narrow with the same pediment detail. The house is presently in a poor state of repair--the windows have been boarded up and it is no longer occupied (except by a healthy population of stray cats). The Chapel trustees have expressed interest in repairing the house if funds could be made available.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Handy Chapel is being nominated under criteria A because of its important contribution to development of the Grand Junction community and representation of a minority population in the community. The chapel is acknowledged as the headquarters of the only African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Grand Junction. It was originally called Wright's Chapel, after an early pastor, Silas Wright. It is currently known as the Handy Chapel. The church and its holdings were deeded to the black people of Grand Junction and not to a specific congregation. It is currently a nondenominational church and stands as a landmark in the history of the black community on the Western Slope and in the State of Colorado.

* * *

In 1881, the Grand Junction Town Company plan provided for each church to have a parcel of land on the northeast corner of each block between Third and Seventh Streets along White Avenue. This community plan is still evidenced by the churches which still stand--the Catholic church stands on Third and White, the Methodist church on Fifth and White and a Presbyterian church on Sixth and White. At the time the town was originally platted, the black community in Grand Junction attended services at the First Methodist Church. In this respect, the Grand Junction community seemed to be in contrast to the "separate but equal" movement which was taking place across the United States at that time. At no time was the black community of Grand Junction segregated or forced to conduct services separately because of their color. The feeling of the black community at that time was that they wanted to start a "church" as a gathering place for themselves. Their religious needs were being served very adequately by the First Methodist and other churches in the community, but the social needs were not being fulfilled as well.

In later years, William Wesley Taylor, a member of one of the town's leading African-American families, and active in the Handy Chapel, recollected in an August 3, 1969 Daily Sentinel article that his father (William Austin Taylor) was instrumental in organizing the first Colored Masonic Lodge in Grand Junction. However, this did not supply enough social outlet for the black community as a whole, not as much as a church could. Taylor's mother organized the Western Federation of Colored People, primarily a social organization, to strengthen ties of the widely-scattered blacks. This still did not fill the need of the black community as a whole--not like the Handy Chapel did.

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

The article went on to state that the black community had always been a closely-knit group--they shared the hardships but not the social life of the white community. Segregation in the strict sense, the story stated, has never existed in Grand Junction. Blacks have always gone where they liked, done much as they pleased, and their children have attended local schools with no problem. Taylor did not feel that racial discrimination ever posed any particular problem in Grand Junction, except in housing. Consequently, the blacks were welcomed into the First Methodist Church with equal rights and privileges as the whites and they attended regular services with whites and shared the same white clergy; however, a growing number of them wanted their own place of worship. Taylor is quoted as saying the choice of the blacks to want have a separate church was their own. They had been invited to attend, or join, white churches but preferred to keep to themselves.

Edwin Price, publisher of the Grand Junction News, and Charles Shanks, the first mayor of Grand Junction, put pressure on George Crawford, President of the Grand Junction Town Company to set aside land for the blacks to establish a church of their own. All three men were members of the First Methodist Church and, as representatives of the Church they assisted the black citizens that were members of the church in realizing their goal of having the same thing the whites in the community had--their own place of worship as well as a social gathering place. None of them were working to forcibly remove the black members from the Methodist Church.

Crawford's Town Company had made provisions for a number of other religious groups to have land for church use, and the Handy Chapel was no different, except that it happened at a later time in the formation of the town of Grand Junction. In just over two weeks, the motion was made and passed that the black citizens of the community would be given property. Finding that all the property that was originally dedicated for church use on the town plat was taken, Crawford made one more dedication in the public interest--lots 29, 30, 31 and 32 in block 79 were offered to the African Methodist Episcopal church of Mesa County. This location was one block east of the western-most church site and conformed to the other church sites dedicated in the original plat. As it had done for the sale of property to all other religious groups, the Town Company asked for a token sum of one dollar for the transfer and, in early 1892, the Town Company plat was amended to provide the black community with 0.29 acres of land on the northeast corner of Second Street and White Avenue to build a church for their own use. Once the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Mesa County accepted the

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property, a warranty deed was issued by the Grand Junction Town Company. The property transaction was unique in that the property was deeded not to a specific congregation or church but to the black citizens of the Grand Junction community. Ownership of the parcel remains thus today.

Construction on the original portion of the building was started on May 17, 1892 by Hunt McDonald and Company at a cost of \$962.50. Later that same year, the members of the church voted to amend the affidavit of the name. The name was changed from the "African Methodist Episcopal Church of Mesa County" to the "African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Grand Junction". It is believed that this was prompted by a lack of interest in the Grand Junction church by the Denver church. In another departure, the Grand Junction church agreed to conduct the church according to the usages and customs of such church society. They did not, however, adopt the Rules of Discipline, a set of AME church laws that state how the church will conduct business and government, at that time.

The chapel was completed late in 1892 and the congregation named it the Wright Chapel after their first pastor, Silas Wright. At some undetermined time around the turn of the century, and for undetermined reasons, it began to be called the Handy Chapel. Church records indicate that it was being called Handy Chapel in 1900.

Since its inception, the building has always served a community function and need far beyond simply a religious function. For example, during the years between 1900 and 1902, the Grand Junction schools experienced a severe shortage of classroom space. The chapel building was pressed into service as additional classroom space for a short time. It was used as though it was any other building and there was no segregation of the students that attended. The chapel simply became an extension of the school district classrooms at the time which were open to all children of the community, black or white. The chapel fulfilled a need of the school district and students were treated no differently than in any other classrooms in the community.

Throughout its 100-year history, the chapel has physically and symbolically been a refuge for the homeless and those in need in the community. People in need of short term help could depend on the church to provide for them in various ways. While the chapel was available to all people regardless of race or religion, it was especially attractive to the black citizens and visitors of Grand Junction. The prevailing feeling of blacks moving West after the Civil War

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was that of uncertainty. If they had moved from the East they certainly had experienced some of the discrimination associated with the Civil War and it would stand to reason that they were more comfortable with seeking out other blacks than they were the white community. Thus, the blacks usually came to Handy Chapel just as it was natural for a white person to go to a "white" church when they were in need. However, if help was needed in an area in which the black church could not assist, the Chapel, then as now, would contact whomever was best qualified to handle the problem. There were times when a black person was helped more fully by a white organization than by the black church. Once they were familiar with the Grand Junction white community, blacks were less apt to feel they were not welcome.

The Handy Chapel was not any more unique in its multi-racial attitude or policy than other churches in Grand Junction were; but because the black community was a close-knit group and had few other social organizations dedicated to helping them, the Chapel was a natural place to which to turn. Blacks were not turned away by other churches, but once the black church was established it was more convenient for them to turn to that church first. If the Chapel was unable to fulfill the need they could look elsewhere.

Black families who were traveling and needed a place to stay, or ran out of money, could depend on help from the church. From time to time the church helped those down on their luck to find temporary jobs in the community. There are hundreds of examples of seemingly small contributions the chapel has made to the community by helping those in need. And it continues to do so. Even today, the small, one room apartment on the east end of the chapel is given to someone in need of a temporary roof over their head. Although the church is known as a black church, those associated with it have always helped people regardless of race, religion or color as have other churches in the Grand Junction community.

* * *

In the late 1970s, the Rocky Mountain Conference of the AME church sold the Handy Chapel to a group of Grand Junction investors for \$68,000. The chapel congregation immediately filed a law suit stating that the Conference had no legal right to sell the property because it had never been turned over to the them. During the trial, the Denver AME church claimed the Rocky Mountain Conference had redeemed tax certificates of the Grand Junction church. They

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further claimed that the Grand Junction church belonged to the general conference of the AME church so that they were qualified to sell it. Testimony showed that the Handy Chapel trustees had never transferred the local church deed to the Rocky Mountain Conference. In April 1981, District Judge James J. Carter ruled that a trust committee of Grand Junction black people must be named to administer the chapel for the charitable and religious use of black citizens of the city. He dismissed the claim of the investment group and the Rocky Mountain Conference. This court decision further substantiates the significance of the Handy Chapel as a community asset rather than just a church building or place of worship.

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Handy Chapel
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Architectural/Historical Component Form ca. 1975; Colorado Cultural
Resource Survey. 5ME.4157.

Daily Sentinel. August 3, 1969; September 16, 1983; September 27, 1992; September 28,
1992.

Dickey, Josephine. Personal interviews and files. Handy Chapel Church Trustee.

Inventory Record Form ca. 1975; Colorado Cultural Resource Survey. 5ME.4157.

Museum of Western Colorado. Grand Junction, Colorado. Archives: Handy Chapel.

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 29 through 32 inclusive, Block 79, City of Grand Junction

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Lots 29 through 32, Block 79 are the same lots originally granted to the black citizens of Grand Junction by the Grand Junction Town Company in 1892.

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

PHOTO 1

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Unknown
4. Unknown
5. Museum of Western Colorado Grand Junction, Colorado
6. View to northeast of south-facing (front) chapel facade
7. 1

PHOTO 2

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to northeast of bell tower on chapel
7. 2

PHOTO 3

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. Eave on south-facing (front) chapel facade
7. 3

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PHOTO 4

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to north of front entry on south-facing chapel facade
7. 4

PHOTO 5

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to north of south-facing (front) chapel facade
7. 5

PHOTO 6

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to east of west-facing (side) chapel facade
7. 6

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

PHOTO 7

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to south of north-facing (rear) chapel facade
7. 7

PHOTO 8

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. March 1994
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to northwest of east-facing (side) chapel facade
7. 8

PHOTO 9

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. Interior view to north of main chapel
7. 9

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Handy Chapel
Mesa County, Colorado

PHOTO 10

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. Interior view to west of chapel window
7. 10

PHOTO 11

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. Interior detail in chapel parsonage
7. 11

PHOTO 12

1. Handy Chapel
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. December 1993
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. Interior detail in chapel parsonage
7. 12

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Handy Chapel
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PHOTO 13

1. Handy Chapel - Chapel House
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. March 1994
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to north of south-facing house facade
7. 13

PHOTO 14

1. Handy Chapel - Chapel House
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. March 1994
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to west of east-facing house facade
7. 14

PHOTO 15

1. Handy Chapel - Chapel House
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. March 1994
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to south of north-facing house facade
7. 15

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Handy Chapel
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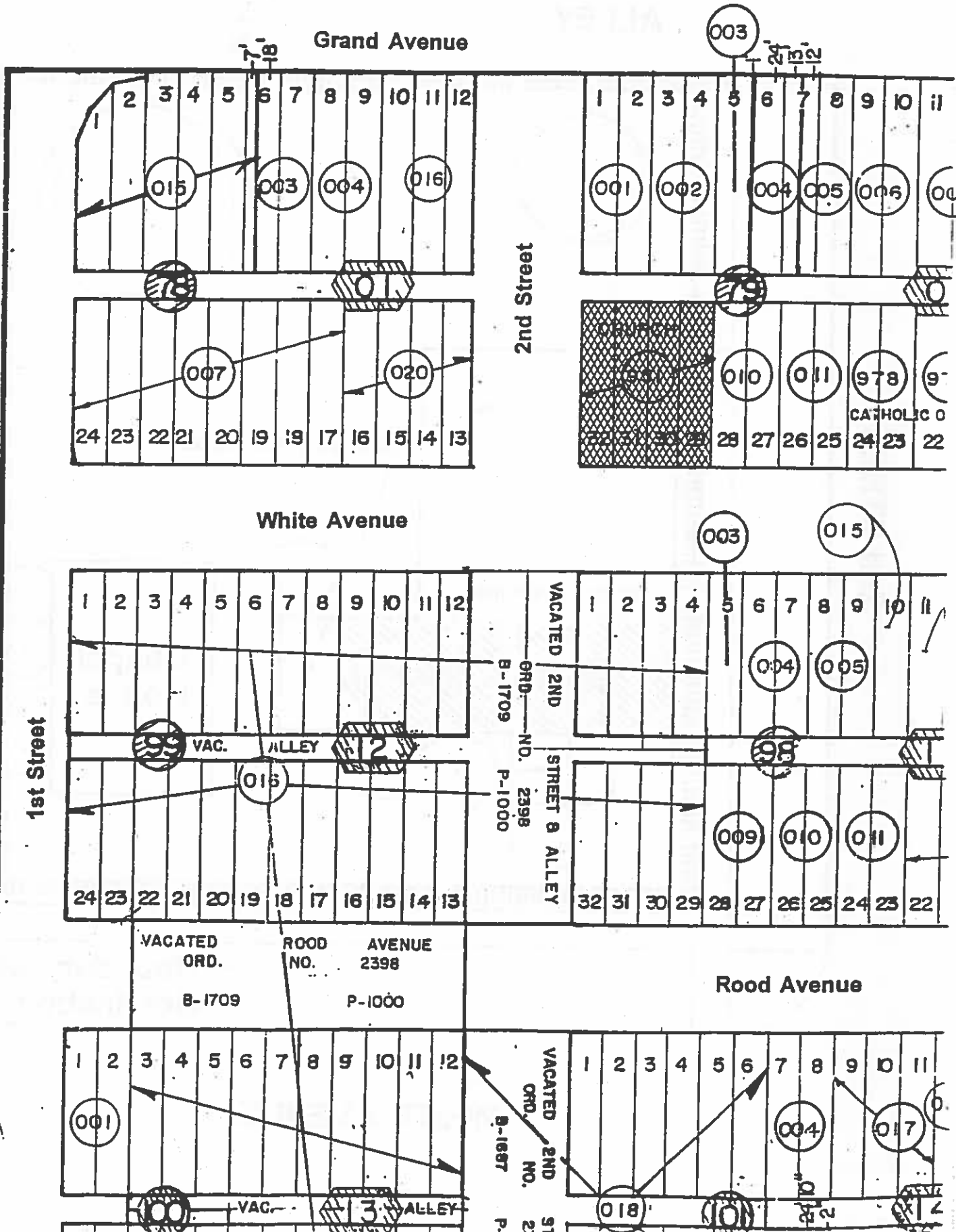
PHOTO 16

1. Handy Chapel - Chapel House
2. Mesa County, Colorado
3. Kristen Ashbeck
4. March 1994
5. City of Grand Junction Community Development Department
6. View to southeast of west-facing house facade
7. 16

North ↑

Mesa County Assessor Map No: 2945143

1" = 100'

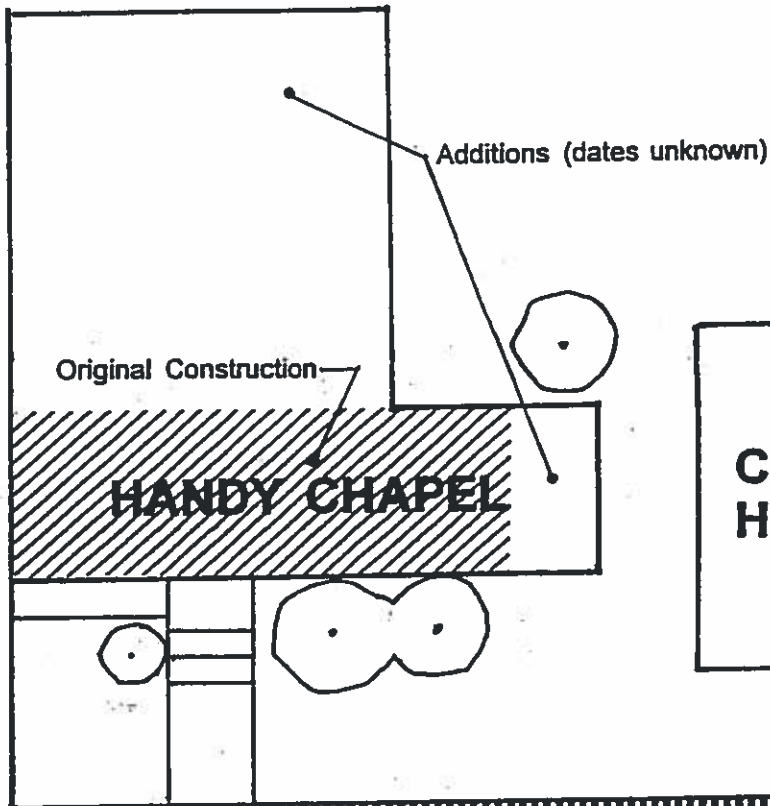
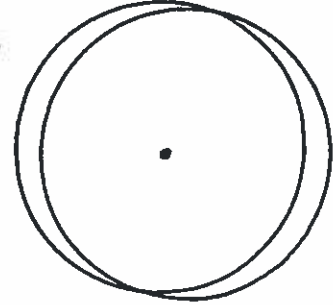
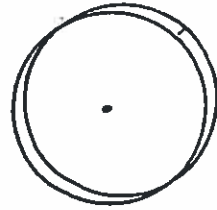


1 inch = 20 feet



ALLEY

2nd STREET



Original Construction

Additions (dates unknown)

HANDY CHAPEL

Chapel House

Boundary of Nomination

WHITE AVENUE

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DESCRIPTION

The Handy Chapel, constructed in 1892, is located on the northeast corner of White Avenue and Second Street in downtown Grand Junction. Next door, there is a turn-of-the-century vernacular wood-frame house that also belongs to the church. Both buildings are sited on the lots originally deeded to the black community by the Grand Junction Town Company. The setting is residential in character, with shrubs and grass in the front yard and large shade trees and grass in the large rear yard (see attached Sketch Map).

The main body of the present chapel is a rectangular plan with front gable roof. It is a simple structure with an absence of architectural features and ornamentation that can distinguish a more specific style. The rear portion of the rectangle was added and then changed to its present design, while the front portion was part of the original structure. There is a gabled ell and a flat-roofed room on the east side--the gabled portion being part of the original construction and flat-roofed portion being a later addition. The attached Site Plan depicts this phased construction. The dates of these changes and additions are unknown but they appear to have been constructed shortly after the original east-west rectangular chapel was completed as it already appears as it does today in a turn-of-the-century photograph (refer to Photo 1). There is a two story-bell tower on the southwest corner of the main gable (Photo 2). The roof has narrow eaves with no ornamentation (Photo 3).

The building was originally of brick construction on a stone foundation (Photo 1). The masonry walls have been covered with a white stucco coating (date unknown). The roof on the bell tower and the main gabled roofs have asphalt shingles. The lower portion of the tower has shake shingles and, although the upper portion is open on all four sides, there is no bell visible in the tower.

The changes that have been made to the building over time actually reflect its perhaps more important use as a refuge to the homeless and in need during its 100 year history. As people came through or to the community in need of work or a roof over their heads, the Handy Chapel temporarily provided both. Men in need of a place to stay or some other help did work on the chapel in exchange. Most of the remodel work that has been done on the building, as well as much of the ongoing maintenance required for the building was and continues to be accomplished in this manner.

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The main chapel entrance is on the south-facing facade with a low stoop at the doorway (Photo 4). A cover above this entry was added at some point and then removed again in the early 1980s at about the same time a handicap access ramp was installed at the main entry. The doorway has a single wood panel door with a segmentally arched opening. There is one other entrance and three windows on this facade that appear to be original openings as they all are similar in their narrow, rectangular dimensions and have similar details with stone sills and segmentally arched openings (Photo 5). The west-facing facade has four, one-over-one narrow rectangular windows that are evenly spaced between shallow buttresses (Photo 6). The buttresses were added sometime in the 1940s or 50s to add support to the roof. The rear and east-facing facades of the chapel are even more simple with few windows and other openings of a functional nature (Photos 7 and 8). Some lean-to rooms have been added to the rear of the chapel over the years (Photo 7). While these additions do not add to the visual quality of the building, they do not detract from the architectural integrity of the Chapel. The lean-to rooms could be easily removed from the site if no longer needed for storage or other purposes.

The interior features of the chapel reflect the same simple nature of this vernacular structure. The chapel is basically one large open room with a central aisle between the theater style seating (Photo 9). At the front of the room, the pulpit is set in the center of a raised platform. The walls and ceiling have a smooth plaster finish. The original woodwork around the windows and doors is intact but it has been painted (Photo 10). Aside from the wooden floor that has been carpeted, the interior appears much as it did over 100 years ago. The eastern wing of the building includes a multipurpose room (gabled roof area) and a one-room living quarters (flat-roofed area). Historically, these rooms were used for similar purposes to support the function of the Chapel itself. The gabled roof area was originally constructed as a parsonage and is still used as such to prepare for services. The living quarters were constructed to be used by a visiting pastor during times when the Chapel did not have its own. Today it is used as a place to house someone in need of a roof over their head. Although the floors have been carpeted, the original brick walls and wooden details of the structure are exposed (Photos 11 and 12).

The adjacent chapel house was constructed in 1915 to provide an additional means for the chapel to serve visitors and families of the community when in need of a place to stay. The house is a simple wooden vernacular structure with little ornamentation. The main part of the

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house is a rectangle built on a concrete foundation with an enclosed porch offset at the front entry. The house has a steeply pitched roof with wooden shake shingles. The porch also has a gable roof with shake shingles but it is not as steeply pitched as that on the house. Both the house and porch have wooden weatherboard cladding. The south-facing front facade has a single rectangular window (Photo 13). The porch has a band of windows across the front. The east-facing (side) has three rectangular wooden windows that are symmetrically spaced. Each window has a wooden pediment detail above (Photo 14). The north-facing (rear) facade has a doorway with a two-step concrete stoop and one rectangular window (Photo 15). The west-facing side has a small, lean-to addition with a door on its north side and a single rectangular window (Photo 16). All of the windows are tall and narrow with the same pediment detail. The house is presently in a poor state of repair--the windows have been boarded up and it is no longer occupied (except by a healthy population of stray cats). The Chapel trustees have expressed interest in repairing the house if funds could be made available.

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Handy Chapel is being nominated under criteria A because of its important contribution to development of the Grand Junction community and representation of a minority population in the community. The chapel is acknowledged as the headquarters of the only African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Grand Junction. It was originally called Wright's Chapel, after an early pastor, Silas Wright. It is currently known as the Handy Chapel. The church and its holdings were deeded to the black people of Grand Junction and not to a specific congregation. It is currently a nondenominational church and stands as a landmark in the history of the black community on the Western Slope and in the State of Colorado.

* * *

In 1881, the Grand Junction Town Company plan provided for each church to have a parcel of land on the northeast corner of each block between Third and Seventh Streets along White Avenue. This community plan is still evidenced by the churches which still stand--the Catholic church stands on Third and White, the Methodist church on Fifth and White and a Presbyterian church on Sixth and White. At the time the town was originally platted, the black community in Grand Junction attended services at the First Methodist Church. In this respect, the Grand Junction community seemed to be in contrast to the "separate but equal" movement which was taking place across the United States at that time. At no time was the black community of Grand Junction segregated or forced to conduct services separately because of their color. The feeling of the black community at that time was that they wanted to start a "church" as a gathering place for themselves. Their religious needs were being served very adequately by the First Methodist and other churches in the community, but the social needs were not being fulfilled as well.

In later years, William Wesley Taylor, a member of one of the town's leading African-American families, and active in the Handy Chapel, recollected in an August 3, 1969 Daily Sentinel article that his father (William Austin Taylor) was instrumental in organizing the first Colored Masonic Lodge in Grand Junction. However, this did not supply enough social outlet for the black community as a whole, not as much as a church could. Taylor's mother organized the Western Federation of Colored People, primarily a social organization, to strengthen ties of the widely-scattered blacks. This still did not fill the need of the black community as a whole--not like the Handy Chapel did.

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The article went on to state that the black community had always been a closely-knit group--they shared the hardships but not the social life of the white community. Segregation in the strict sense, the story stated, has never existed in Grand Junction. Blacks have always gone where they liked, done much as they pleased, and their children have attended local schools with no problem. Taylor did not feel that racial discrimination ever posed any particular problem in Grand Junction, except in housing. Consequently, the blacks were welcomed into the First Methodist Church with equal rights and privileges as the whites and they attended regular services with whites and shared the same white clergy; however, a growing number of them wanted their own place of worship. Taylor is quoted as saying the choice of the blacks to want have a separate church was their own. They had been invited to attend, or join, white churches but preferred to keep to themselves.

Edwin Price, publisher of the Grand Junction News, and Charles Shanks, the first mayor of Grand Junction, put pressure on George Crawford, President of the Grand Junction Town Company to set aside land for the blacks to establish a church of their own. All three men were members of the First Methodist Church and, as representatives of the Church they assisted the black citizens that were members of the church in realizing their goal of having the same thing the whites in the community had--their own place of worship as well as a social gathering place. None of them were working to forcibly remove the black members from the Methodist Church.

Crawford's Town Company had made provisions for a number of other religious groups to have land for church use, and the Handy Chapel was no different, except that it happened at a later time in the formation of the town of Grand Junction. In just over two weeks, the motion was made and passed that the black citizens of the community would be given property. Finding that all the property that was originally dedicated for church use on the town plat was taken, Crawford made one more dedication in the public interest--lots 29, 30, 31 and 32 in block 79 were offered to the African Methodist Episcopal church of Mesa County. This location was one block east of the western-most church site and conformed to the other church sites dedicated in the original plat. As it had done for the sale of property to all other religious groups, the Town Company asked for a token sum of one dollar for the transfer and, in early 1892, the Town Company plat was amended to provide the black community with 0.29 acres of land on the northeast corner of Second Street and White Avenue to build a church for their own use. Once the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Mesa County accepted the

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property, a warranty deed was issued by the Grand Junction Town Company. The property transaction was unique in that the property was deeded not to a specific congregation or church but to the black citizens of the Grand Junction community. Ownership of the parcel remains thus today.

Construction on the original portion of the building was started on May 17, 1892 by Hunt McDonald and Company at a cost of \$962.50. Later that same year, the members of the church voted to amend the affidavit of the name. The name was changed from the "African Methodist Episcopal Church of Mesa County" to the "African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Grand Junction". It is believed that this was prompted by a lack of interest in the Grand Junction church by the Denver church. In another departure, the Grand Junction church agreed to conduct the church according to the usages and customs of such church society. They did not, however, adopt the Rules of Discipline, a set of AME church laws that state how the church will conduct business and government, at that time.

The chapel was completed late in 1892 and the congregation named it the Wright Chapel after their first pastor, Silas Wright. At some undetermined time around the turn of the century, and for undetermined reasons, it began to be called the Handy Chapel. Church records indicate that it was being called Handy Chapel in 1900.

Since its inception, the building has always served a community function and need far beyond simply a religious function. For example, during the years between 1900 and 1902, the Grand Junction schools experienced a severe shortage of classroom space. The chapel building was pressed into service as additional classroom space for a short time. It was used as though it was any other building and there was no segregation of the students that attended. The chapel simply became an extension of the school district classrooms at the time which were open to all children of the community, black or white. The chapel fulfilled a need of the school district and students were treated no differently than in any other classrooms in the community.

Throughout its 100-year history, the chapel has physically and symbolically been a refuge for the homeless and those in need in the community. People in need of short term help could depend on the church to provide for them in various ways. While the chapel was available to all people regardless of race or religion, it was especially attractive to the black citizens and visitors of Grand Junction. The prevailing feeling of blacks moving West after the Civil War

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was that of uncertainty. If they had moved from the East they certainly had experienced some of the discrimination associated with the Civil War and it would stand to reason that they were more comfortable with seeking out other blacks than they were the white community. Thus, the blacks usually came to Handy Chapel just as it was natural for a white person to go to a "white" church when they were in need. However, if help was needed in an area in which the black church could not assist, the Chapel, then as now, would contact whomever was best qualified to handle the problem. There were times when a black person was helped more fully by a white organization than by the black church. Once they were familiar with the Grand Junction white community, blacks were less apt to feel they were not welcome.

The Handy Chapel was not any more unique in its multi-racial attitude or policy than other churches in Grand Junction were; but because the black community was a close-knit group and had few other social organizations dedicated to helping them, the Chapel was a natural place to which to turn. Blacks were not turned away by other churches, but once the black church was established it was more convenient for them to turn to that church first. If the Chapel was unable to fulfill the need they could look elsewhere.

Black families who were traveling and needed a place to stay, or ran out of money, could depend on help from the church. From time to time the church helped those down on their luck to find temporary jobs in the community. There are hundreds of examples of seemingly small contributions the chapel has made to the community by helping those in need. And it continues to do so. Even today, the small, one room apartment on the east end of the chapel is given to someone in need of a temporary roof over their head. Although the church is known as a black church, those associated with it have always helped people regardless of race, religion or color as have other churches in the Grand Junction community.

* * *

In the late 1970s, the Rocky Mountain Conference of the AME church sold the Handy Chapel to a group of Grand Junction investors for \$68,000. The chapel congregation immediately filed a law suit stating that the Conference had no legal right to sell the property because it had never been turned over to the them. During the trial, the Denver AME church claimed the Rocky Mountain Conference had redeemed tax certificates of the Grand Junction church. They United States Department of the Interior
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further claimed that the Grand Junction church belonged to the general conference of the AME church so that they were qualified to sell it. Testimony showed that the Handy Chapel trustees had never transferred the local church deed to the Rocky Mountain Conference. In April 1981, District Judge James J. Carter ruled that a trust committee of Grand Junction black people must be named to administer the chapel for the charitable and religious use of black citizens of the city. He dismissed the claim of the investment group and the Rocky Mountain Conference. This court decision further substantiates the significance of the Handy Chapel as a community asset rather than just a church building or place of worship.

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