

## RAMAH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



*This report was written on January 2, 1979*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church is located on Ramah Church Rd. east of Huntersville, NC, in the northern section of Mecklenburg County.

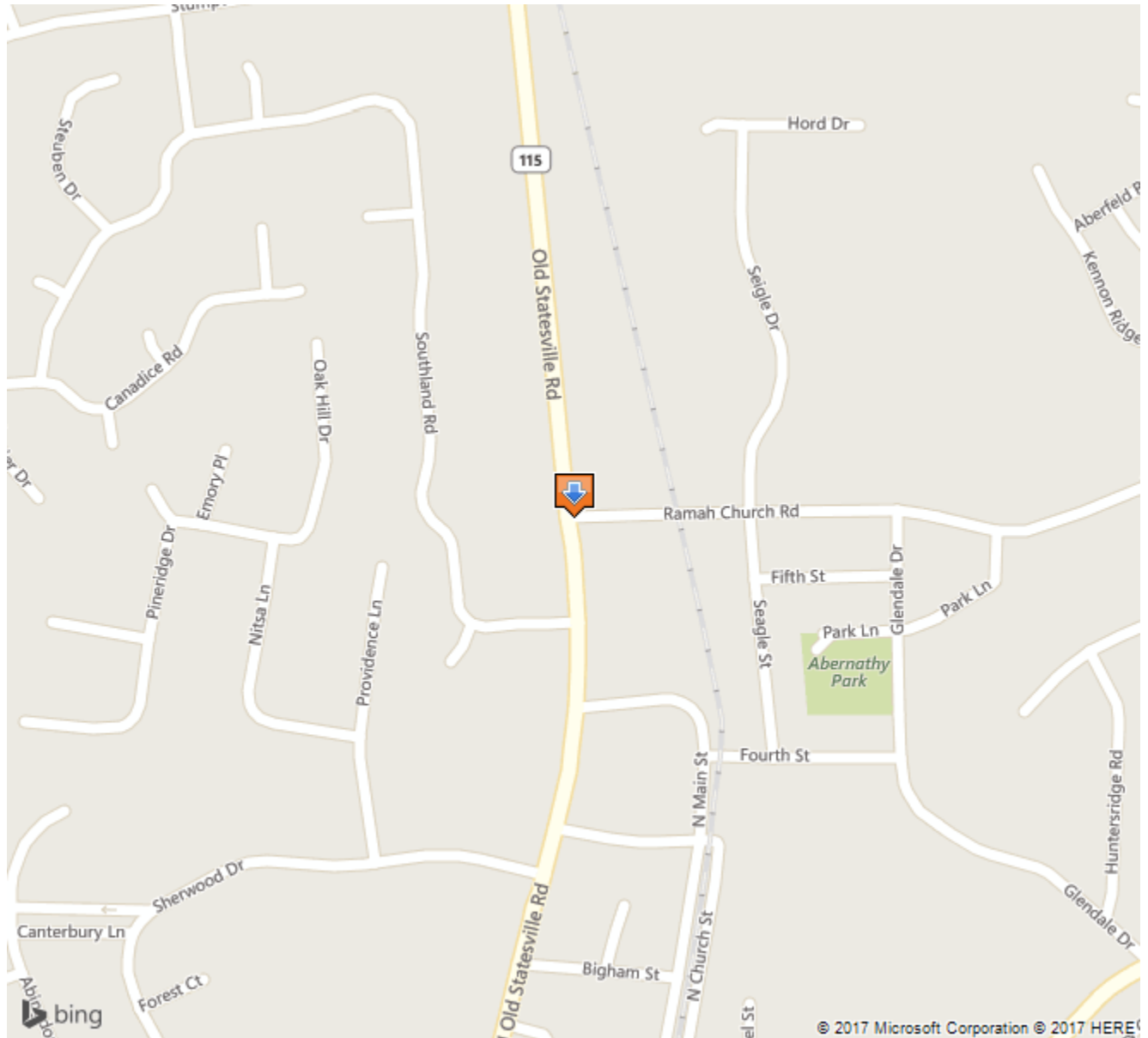
**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:**  
The present owner and occupant of the property is:

Ramah Presbyterian Church  
Route 2 Box 300  
Huntersville, NC 28078

Telephone: (704) 875-6683

**3. Representative photograph of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent reference to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1638 at page 173. The earliest reference to the property as belonging to Ramah Presbyterian Church is recorded in Old Deed Book 19 at page 266. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 01115101.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:**

The founders of Ramah Presbyterian Church belonged to that heterogeneous aggregate of pioneers who began to settle the Carolina backcountry in the mid-1700's. Like their counterparts at such places as Hopewell, Sugar Creek, Rocky River, Providence and Steele Creek, these Scotch Irish immigrants

faced the enormous challenge of bringing order and structure to the Piedmont frontier. Because their collective identity sprang largely from religious convictions, the yeomen who secured land in the vicinity of Ramah Creek moved quickly to establish a place of worship. Although the initial session house, a log structure, was not completed until ca. 1783, local tradition holds that services were held in a brush arbor at Ramah Grove several years prior to this date.<sup>1</sup> The records of the Mecklenburg Presbytery reveal that the congregation was officially organized in 1795.<sup>2</sup>

Log structures, such as the initial session house at Ramah Presbyterian Church, were predominant in the Carolina backcountry in the 1700's. Edifices with walls built of logs laid horizontally were a medieval invention of various North European peoples and by the end of the seventeenth century were common in the Scandinavian countries, Finland and the Baltic provinces of Russia. Most scholars agree that the form was brought to America by the Swedes who established the colony of New Sweden on Delaware Bay in 1638. The log structures of the Piedmont, however, followed the design which the Germans had brought to Pennsylvania in the early 1700's. Constructed of square-hewn timbers with dovetailed joints these buildings were well-suited to the region. Because labor was expensive and tools rudimentary, the farmers who came to the Carolina backcountry erected buildings which could be most easily fashioned from the timber provided by the surrounding forests. Logs were hewn to size by an adze and a simple [dovetail joint](#) constructed at the corners. The average log without too much tapering was about twenty to twenty-four feet in length. This factor determined the maximum of the edifices which could be fashioned in this manner.<sup>3</sup>

The initial session house survived until 1820, when it was replaced by a [frame](#) edifice. This building served the congregation until 1881, when the present church was built and dedicated. The size and character of the physical facility used by the Presbyterian congregation at Ramah Creek have experienced considerable expansion and alteration in the twentieth century. A log structure, locally known as "The Hut" was erected in 1935 for the Men's Bible Class. In 1954 a manse was built for the first full time resident minister.<sup>4</sup> An Educational Building with a colored passageway to the church was completed in 1958.<sup>5</sup> The church itself has undergone two major transformations, one in the 1920's and another in 1972-73. The first of these involved the excavation of a basement in which a furnace was placed, the laying of granite rubble in-fill between the original granite piers of the foundation, the building of new entry steps and portico, and the placement of partitions in the balcony for purposes of creating Sunday School classrooms.<sup>6</sup>

The second and more extensive renovation included new windows, a new roof and new shutters for the exterior, a new ceiling and new shutters for the interior, new plaster and carpet, new electrical wiring and light sources, the removal of the partitions in the balcony, insulation of the walls, and the installation of central air conditioning and a central vacuum cleaner.<sup>7</sup> The members of Ranch Presbyterian Church undertook the 1972-73 renovation with the following purpose in mind: The aim is to restore the building as closely to the original as possible using the style of architecture appropriate to the era in which the church was built, and to retain the charm and beauty of this rural church as well as the functional qualities for worship in simplicity and reverent dignity.<sup>8</sup>

On balance, the members achieved this objective. Indeed, both in terms of the scale and appearance of the church itself and in terms of the overall setting of the edifice, Ramah Presbyterian Church retains the ambience of a place of worship in rural Mecklenburg during an earlier era. Obtrusive encroachments upon the property have yet to occur. The church itself continues to adhere to the

denominational preferences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for unadorned, temple form edifices which would contrast sharply with the symbols of Anglicanism and which would express the Presbyterian's commitment to democratic values.<sup>9</sup>The burial ground, situated immediately across Ramah Church Rd., contains a metal entrance gate with flanking granite posts, most probably dating from the mid-1800's. Several gravestones from the early nineteenth century are extant.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Our History," Ramah Presbyterian Church (A pamphlet published by Ramah Presbyterian Church, ca. 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Raven Brockmann, *Mecklenburg Presbytery: A History* (Office of the Executive Secretary, Mecklenburg Presbytery, Charlotte, NC, 1962), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Lawrence S. Barden, Dr. James W. Clay, Mr. Owen J. Feruseth, Dr. Dan Morrill, Dr. Nelson S. Nunnally, "Socio-Economic Overview Of The Uwharrie National Forest And Environs" (An Environmental Impact Statement submitted to the National Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1978), pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> "Our History."

<sup>5</sup> Ramah Church Renovation Fund Drive. (A pamphlet published by Ramah Presbyterian Church, ca. 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Interview of Rev. Glenn L. Hill, pastor of Ramah Presbyterian Church, by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (December 18, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Ramah Church Renovation Fund Drive.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Eliza Davidson, "North Carolina Country Churches: Explorations in the Mountains and the Tidewater" in Doug Swaim., *Carolina Dwelling* (The Student Publication of the School of Design, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C., 1978), vol. 26., pp. 184-195.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Historical and cultural significance:** The historical and cultural significance of the property known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church rests upon the following factors. First, it is one of the older Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County. Second, the present church building retains its essential exterior integrity and is surpassed in age only by Providence Presbyterian Church as an example of a nineteenth century frame session house in Mecklenburg County. Third, the overall setting of Ramah Presbyterian retains its essential rural ambience.

**b. Suitability for preservation and restoration:** The church and grounds are in an excellent state of repair and are highly suited for preservation.

**c. Educational value:** The Ramah Presbyterian Church has educational value because of the historical and cultured significance of the property.

**d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance, or repair:** At present, the Commission has no intention of securing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in this property. The Commission presently assumes that all costs associated with restoring and maintaining the property will be paid by the owner or subsequent owner of the property.

**e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property:** The Commission believes that the property is best-suited to the needs of the congregation of Ramah Presbyterian Church. However, if necessary, the property could be adapted to a variety of purposes.

**f. Appraised value:** The current tax appraisal of the 30 acres of land owned by Ramah Presbyterian Church is \$22,500. The tax appraisal of all improvements on the land is \$126,190 and \$20,370 for the church itself. As a religious institution, the Ramah Presbyterian Church is not required to pay Ad Valorem taxes. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for a deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The deferral would not apply in the case of the current owner.

**g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person organization:** As stated earlier, the Commission presently has no intention of securing the fee simple or any lesser included interest in this property. Furthermore, the Commission presently assumes that all costs associated with the property will be paid by the present or subsequent owner of the property.

**9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's judgment is its knowledge that the National Register of Historic Places, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, represents the decision of the Federal Government to expand its recognition of historic properties to include those of local, regional, and state significance. The Commission believes that its investigation of the property, known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church, demonstrates that the property possesses local historical and cultural importance. Consequently, the Commission judges that the property known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places.

**10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County:** The property known as the Ramah Presbyterian Church is historically important to Mecklenburg County for three reasons. First, it is one of the older Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County. Second, the present church building retains its essential exterior integrity and is surpassed in age only by [Providence Presbyterian Church](#) as an example of a nineteenth century frame session house in Mecklenburg County. Third, the overall setting of Ramah Presbyterian retains its essential rural ambience.

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### Bibliography

*An Inventory of Older Buildings In Mecklenburg County and Charlotte for the Historic Properties Commission*

Dr. Lawrence S. Barden, Dr. James W. Clay, Mr. Owen J. Furuseth, Dr. Dan Morrill, Dr. Nelson S. Nunnally, "Socio-Economic Overview of the Uwharrie National Forest and Environs," (an Environmental Impact Statement submitted to the National Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1978).

Charles Raven Brockmann. *Mecklenburg Presbyterian: A History* (Office of the Executive Secretary. Mecklenburg Presbyterian) Charlotte. NC, 1962.

Eliza Davidson. "North Carolina Counted Churches: Explorations in the Mountains and the Tidewater," in *Carolina Dwelling*, ed. By Doug Swaim (The Student Publication of the School of Design. North Carolina State University. Raleigh. NC, 1978. vol. 26).

Interview with Rev. Glenn L. Hill, pastor of Ramah Presbyterian Church, by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (December 18, 1978).

"Our History," Ramah Presbyterian Church (A pamphlet by Ramah Presbyterian Church, ca. 1957).

"Ramah Church Renovation Fund Drive." (A pamphlet published by Ramah Preservation Church, ca. 1973).

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** January 2, 1979

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission

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### *Architectural Description*

The Ramah Presbyterian Church is a three bay wide by five bay deep frame structure with a **random ashlar** foundation and **gable roof** of wood shingles. Its design, reflective of the denominational preference for unpretentious but dignified temple-form edifices, is typical in most respects of the meeting house style that was so popular in earlier Presbyterian churches. In terms of Mecklenburg County, Ramah Presbyterian is similar to Providence Presbyterian Church in that it is a simple rectangular high box shape of white frame construction with a gable front and rear. The dimensions are 40 feet by 60 feet and 20 feet in height from the ground to the eaves. The design is symmetrical. The foundation wall is two feet high and initially consisted of a series of granite single-stone piers. Later the space between was filled with granite blocks laid in a random ashlar pattern.

Topping the foundation is a twelve inch wide board with a water table from which the siding starts. At the top of the siding is a twelve inch wide frieze board, with a overhang above the frieze projecting about two feet. The soffit of the overhang, being too wide for one board, is made of two, and the innermost laps the outermost. To soften the square edge of the innermost board, a small cove is used. This design is unusual. There is a normal sized coved bed mold in the corner between the frieze and the soffit. On the outer edge of the overhang the narrow fascia board of the cornice is capped with a 5 inch convex crown mold. The frieze returns about 18 inches on the front and rear walls, thus causing the crown mold to have a return of 5-1/2 feet paralleling the frieze before turning back again 2 feet to butt the front wall. The rake up the gables has the same overhang and moldings as the sides. The four corners of the exterior walls have nine inch wide corner boards or pilasters running from the water table to the frieze.

There is a small mold across the boards at the top. On the two front corners of the church there is mounted on the frieze above these moldings the date 1881 in cast iron numerals. On the rear wall is a small projection or apse 5 feet by 11 feet and as high as the church windows. It may not be original since those pitches were often added to old Presbyterian churches. A brick chimney has been added to the rear. The siding is composed of square-edged lapped boards with a 5-1/2 inch exposure and is almost certainly the original. The floor boards appear to be the original and are of a random width of 4 to 5 inches. The framing lumber was cut by circular saw and the floor joists are modern in size and spacing but rough sawn. The main entrance is located at the center of the front and is 5-1/2 foot by 8 1/2 feet high. The brick steps and metal balustrades providing access thereto are not original, but the six-paneled double doors probably are. Surrounding the **transom light** above the front entrance is a straight-sided segmental arch more typical of the Italianate style.

A single doorway, not original, is situated at the rear bay on the right side of the church and opens on to a covered passageway which leads to the Educational Building. A basement entrance of recent origin is on the rear. The window sash and glass are not the originals nor are the exterior blinds. Five

nine-over-nine windows with louvered blinds with splayed tops are on the right side, four on the left side and two equidistant from the front entrance. Three six-over-six windows are located at the balcony level of the front and a louvered window is situated above. Four-over-four windows are on either side of the apse, and nine-over-nine windows, without blinds, are at the outer bays of the rear. The interior of the church is composed of a vestibule which is not original and from which two doorways lead to the sanctuary, an original enclosed stairway on the left side of the vestibule which rises in one landing to the balcony, a room at either side of the vestibule, the balcony which is bordered by a balustrade, the sanctuary and the apse. Red carpet covers the original floor. The beaded ceiling except at the transom light above the front entrance and at the stairway was installed in the 1972-73 renovation, as were the lighting fixtures and the blinds. According to the minister "none of the original church furniture survives." As noted earlier, Ramah Presbyterian Church is similar to Providence Presbyterian Church. The difference is in the fenestration. At Ramah the five windows on each side and the two in the front and in the rear are only 9-1/2 feet high and thus stop 51/2 feet short of the eave leaving a blank wall above. On the front there is a smaller window over each big window and over the center doorway. These smaller windows are for the balcony, and since there is no balcony on either side, the windows on the sides do not run up to the eave as they do at Providence, which has the typical side balconies and high window.