Survey and Research Report

on the

St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory

Name and location of the property: The property known as the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory is located at 8600 Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road in Huntersville, North Carolina.

Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:

The current owner of the property is:
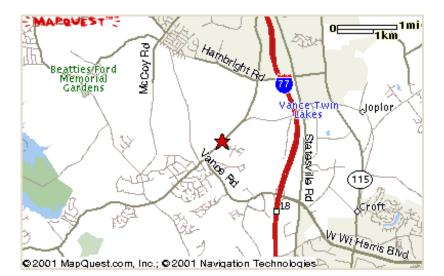
St. Mark's Episcopal Church

8600 Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road

Huntersville, NC 28208

Telephone: (704) 399-5193

Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property. UTM: 17 508737E 3914577N

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Current deed book reference to the property: The most recent deed to the property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1870, page 119. The tax parcel number for the property is 25-161-07.

A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Emily D. Ramsey.

A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Emily D. Ramsey.

Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1. The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory forms an integral part of one of the oldest church complexes in Mecklenburg County – the church

itself, the oldest rural Episcopal congregation in the county, was formed in 1884.

2. The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, erected ca. 1897, was constructed by John Ellis McAuley, a local builder and carpenter who built a number of frame houses in the Long Creek community in addition to fashioning all of the brick used in the St. Mark's Episcopal Church building.

3. The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, a T-shaped modification of the typical I-house plan, is an excellently preserved example of rural architecture in Mecklenburg County, and remains as a tangible reminder of the agrarian lifestyle in such rural communities as Long Creek.

b. **Integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.**

The Commission contends that the architectural description by Emily D. Ramsey demonstrates that the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory meets this criterion.

Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal for the improvements is $42,490. The current Ad Valorem tax appraisal for the one acre of land is $19,200.

Date of Preparation of this Report:

August 1, 2001

Prepared By:

Emily D. Ramsey

745 Georgia Trail

Lincolnton, NC 28092

Statement of Significance

St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory

8600 Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road

Huntersville, NC

Summary

The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, constructed ca. 1897, is a structure that possesses local historic significance as an integral part of one of the oldest and best preserved rural church complexes in Mecklenburg County, and as a tangible reminder of the simple agrarian lifestyle of the county's small rural communities. The organization of Saint Mark's church in 1884 had a tremendous impact on the small rural Long Creek community. The Hopewell Presbyterian Church had dominated the religious and social lives of Long Creek residents since its inception in the mid-1700s; when St. Mark's rustic Gothic church building was completed in 1887, the congregation had already developed a small but loyal group of members, thanks in large part to the efforts of the church's first pastor, the Reverend Edwin Augustus Osborne. The late 1800s saw the beginnings of a cotton boom that would buoy Mecklenburg County's agrarian economy through the turn of the century and the first decade s of the twentieth century. Some local farmers prospered during this period, and they built new schools, churches and houses to reflect their success. St. Mark's Episcopal Church and Rectory, like many of the rural resources left in the county, represents this period of growth and prosperity in Mecklenburg's rural communities. The church complex, which included the church building and the rectory, set high on a hill overlooking the Long Creek farmlands, became of the new center of community life for a number of Long Creek's established families.

The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, an excellently preserved example of rural architecture in Mecklenburg County, is also significant as the work of local builder John Ellis McAuley. The construction of the rectory began in the late 1800s to house local pastors assisting the Reverend Osborne, who lived in Charlotte, with his duties at St. Mark's. McAuley erected a large but simply adorned farmhouse, facing the church, on the northwest corner of the gently sloping hilltop that had been donated to the congregation by the McCoy and Houston families. McAuley, who had constructed several similar houses within the northwestern sections of Mecklenburg County, such as the William and Cora Osborne House and the Ephraim Alexander McAuley House, was also a master brick mason – using clay from a nearby creek bank and a series of wooden molds, he made all of the bricks used in the construction of the St. Mark's church building. McAuley's design for the church rectory, a T-shaped modification of the popular I-house plan, reflected the conservative nature of rural communities in the late-nineteenth century,

while incorporating modest decorative elements of the popular Victorian style. The house has been excellently preserved by the St. Mark's congregation, and the building remains much as it was when it was completed near the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, the church complex retains its original rural setting, set atop a hill and buffered from the rapidly expanding residential development along Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road by a thickly wooded perimeter.

Historical Background and Context Statement

The decades after the Civil War proved to be a time of great prosperity for Mecklenburg County farmers. Although the agrarian economy had been disrupted during the Civil War, the North Carolina piedmont emerged from the ravages of war relatively unscathed, with vital railroads, growing towns and established rural communities intact. Mecklenburg's farmers, most of whom cultivated only around one hundred acres without the help of African and African American slaves, were not devastated financially by Emancipation and the end of the plantation economy. Rather, the post-bellum period saw many farmers in rural communities across the county planting cotton as a major cash crop for the first time, thanks in large part to the development of the fertilizer Peruvian guano. As cotton hit record high prices in the 1870s, farmers in the small communities surrounding Charlotte – which had emerged in the post-bellum period as a leading cotton trading center – took advantage of the opportunities provided by the burgeoning economy and prospered.1

The Long Creek community, located between Charlotte and the town of Huntersville along the Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road, contained some of the area's most successful farming families, all of whom flourished during the post-war cotton boom. As was the case in most of the county's farming communities, the Long Creek community was formed around a deeply-held Protestant religious faith. Indeed, the community that developed in the Long Creek area during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was more intimately tied to the Presbyterian church than almost any other rural community in Mecklenburg County. Hopewell Presbyterian Church, the oldest Presbyterian congregation in the county and "one of the oldest Christian churches in Mecklenburg," was formed in the Long Creek area during the mid-1750s by itinerate ministers from as far away as New York and Pennsylvania, all hoping to spread their faith among the Scots-Irish families who had settled along the Catawba River.2 As one of the only mission churches in Mecklenburg County, Hopewell attracted members of Long Creek's richest and most successful planting families, including John Davidson and Alexander Caldwell, as well as several signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.3

Although Hopewell remained the social and religious center of Long Creek throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and through the Civil War, discontent was brewing within the congregation. Long-time member Columbus W. McCoy, dissatisfied with the teachings of the Presbyterian ministers at Hopewell, began looking for an alternative to the strict religious dictates of Calvinism. After several discussions with the Reverend Edwin A. Osborne, who had himself left the Hopewell congregation to study for the

Episcopalian ministry, McCoy took steps to bring the Episcopal church to Long Creek. He began attending services at St. Peter's Episcopal Church (then the only Episcopal church in Mecklenburg County), occasionally bringing interested friends and neighbors from the country. In 1883, McCoy invited the rector of St. Peter's, the Reverend Joseph Blount Cheshire, to preach to a gathering in Long Creek. Cheshire held a series of weekend services at the Beech Cliff School House, on the land of Columbus's brother, Albert McCoy. By June of the following year, Cheshire declared that the loyal participants of his Episcopal services were ready to officially join the church and form their own Episcopal congregation. Among the nineteen founding members of the church were Columbus and Albert McCoy, Captain Thomas Gluyas, (a prominent farmer and former member of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners), W. D. Jamison, W. D. Price, N. J. Price, L. F. Jamison, R. V. Kerns, R. D. Whitley (who owned the nearby grist mill), Maria Davis, and Jennie D. Alexander.4 Because of the church's status as the second Episcopal congregation in the county after St. Peter's, Reverent Cheshire and Reverend Osborne suggested the name of St. Mark's, "because of the Biblical association between St. Mark and St. Peter as companions, which could represent a like association between the two . . . churches." 5

Although Reverend Cheshire served initially as the "minister in charge" of the St. Mark's mission church, the Reverend Edwin Osborne, whose "earnest and straightforward preaching style" had particularly impressed the small congregation, was asked to take over the position in 1885.6 Osborne was a particularly instrumental figure during the first decades of the St. Mark's mission, and he was widely respected as a progressive minister with a varied background and a deep commitment to the Episcopal Church. Osborn entered the Civil War at the age of 24 as Captain of a local Company in Iredell County, eventually rising to the rank of Colonel. After the war, he married and settled down to a career as a lawyer in Charlotte. After ten years in the prestigious post of Clerk of the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County, Osborne resigned to enter the ministry and devote his life to the church. St. Mark's Mission was only Osborne's second appointment as a minister – he was ordained in 1877 and served first at a small congregation in Fletcher, North Carolina. His experience in Fletcher did little to prepare him for the uphill battle of establishing a new church in the Long Creek Community, where Hopewell Presbyterian Church exerted so much influence. After six months in his new post, Osborne observed that "the opposition to the work [of the Mission] is very strong and very bitter. Every influence that can be brought to bear against us is used, and I hear much misrepresentation begin used." 7

Despite the hostile resistance of community members still loyal to Hopewell, St. Mark's Mission slowly gained members and influence within Long Creek. In February of 1885, Robert D. McCoy Whitley and Benjamin Houston, both large landowners and members of St. Mark's, donated a two and one-quarter acre plot of rolling hilltop farmland to the church trustees, with the understanding that work would begin as soon as possible on a building to house the mission.8 The construction of the country Gothic church building utilized the talents of local builder Joseph Grady, Sr., who acted as general contractor, and carpenter and brick mason John Ellis McAuley, who made all of the bricks for the church building with clay from a nearby creek, which he shaped in crude wooden molds and fired

in a homemade kiln.9 The first services were held inside the church building on March 27, 1887, less than a year after construction began, but the church was far from finished. Throughout the late 1880s and into the 1890s, interior features such as an alter, chancel rail, prayer desk, and credence table were added to the church. On May 10, 1896, nearly a decade after the church building was started, the St. Mark's Episcopal Mission Church was consecrated.

With this major milestone conquered, the congregation turned it attention to building a home in anticipation of a minister who could serve the mission full-time. Although the Reverend Osborne had served St. Mark's throughout the mission's growing pains, he continued to reside in Charlotte, dividing his time between his duties at St. Mark's and his work as Superintendent of the Thompson Orphanage and Training Institute in Charlotte, which he had founded in 1887.10 In the last years of the nineteenth century, St. Mark's trustees commissioned John McAuley (who had fashioned the bricks for the church's sanctuary) to build a modest parsonage. The Whitley family, along with Justice Heriot Clarkson and his wife, Mary Osborne Clarkson, donated a small parcel of land on the other side of the country crossroads that ran in front of the St. Mark's church.11 McAuley, who had constructed several similar one-and-two story farmhouses across the Long Creek area, completed the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory, a T-shaped modification of the popular I-house plan with understated Victorian detailing, around 1898. Although Reverend Osborne continued to serve as the mission's official leader until 1910, he did not move into the newly completed rectory. Instead, St. Mark's trustees used the building to house several of Osborne's assistant pastors. In addition, the rectory served as the community Masonic lodge. The St. Mark's rectory served as home to ministers of the modest mission church only until the early 1930s, when financial strain forced the congregation to rent the house out to local families.12 The rectory now serves as a community house and educational building for the congregation, and remains an integral part of religious and community life in the Long Creek community.

Architectural Context Statement and Physical Description

Architecturally, the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory reflects the conservative nature of the rural communities in Mecklenburg County and surrounding areas. Although fundamental changes had occurred in the practice of building during the last half of the nineteenth century, including the introduction of mass-produced building materials (made

easily accessible through the ever-expanding network of railroads that crossed the South) and the advent of light and labor-saving balloon and braced framing, architecturally, the rural communities of Mecklenburg County adhered to simple and traditional forms when erecting their own buildings. The most popular of these forms was the I-house, traditionally a two-story, single-pile frame structure with a central hall flanked on each side by a single room. Though largely considered a pre-railroad house form, the I-house persisted, with numerous variations, throughout the countryside through the nineteenth century, as the St. Mark's Rectory attests, and even into the twentieth century.

Although John McAuley built the St. Mark's Rectory as a simple T-shaped modification of the typical I-house plan, he was not immune to the influence of the wildly popular Victorian architectural style, with its host of surface ornamentation such as sawnwork, vergeboards, and spindlework.13 McAuley's understated version of such Victorian detailing adorns the doorway and porch posts of the Rectory, ornamentation which is mimicked in the interior woodwork of the church building. The "simple wooden columns . . . topped by scroll-sawn brackets and arch-shaped trim" that stand where the side wings join the nave may well have been McAuley's work as well.14 His work as a carpenter and builder were well-known among Long Creek residents – in addition to his work with St. Mark's Church and Rectory, McAuley constructed several one and two-story houses across the community.15

The St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory is a two-story, double pile, T-shaped, side-gabled frame structure with several one and one-and-a-half story additions extending from its northwest (rear) elevation. The building has been remarkably well preserved, and remains much as it was when built near the turn of the century. The rectory retains its original weatherboard siding, brick end chimneys, decorative door surrounds and door, and original scrolled porch posts and hipped porch. The only notable changes to the exterior are the addition of an exterior metal stair, rising to a second floor window along the southwest (side) elevation, the enclosure of two rear porches, and the replacement of the windows (most likely originally a double-hung, six-over-six configuration). The interior of the rectory is equally pristine, with original wooden floors, bead board walls

and ceilings, wooden doors with original hardware, and the original staircase, with dark rounded newel posts and railing, all intact. As one of only two rectories included in the 1997 survey of historic rural resources in Mecklenburg County compiled by Sherry Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, the St. Mark's Episcopal Rectory is a rare rural resource.

As important as the integrity of the house itself is the integrity of its originally rural surroundings. Although recent years have seen residential development increase exponentially along the once lightly traveled Mt. Holly- Huntersville Road, the St. Mark's Episcopal Church and Rectory have retained much of their originally rural setting, and form perhaps the only rural church complex in Mecklenburg County. The two buildings sit facing each other atop a wooded knoll above the Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road. The church graveyard stretches down the northeast slope of the hill, and the complex is surrounded by a buffering perimeter of dense thickets. At one time, the Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road ran up the hill and between the church building and the rectory, rather than around the foot of the hill as it does now. The church building and the rectory, along with the rural St. Mark's school, the Whitley mill and a nearby country store (all of which are no longer standing), formed the heart of religious, social and commercial life for many Long Creek residents.16 Despite the change in the Mt. Holly – Huntersville Road, and despite the addition of a 1950s brick educational and activities building near the northern corner of the church building, the St. Mark's Episcopal Church complex retains a sense of its original rural setting.

As one of the only rural church rectories remaining in Mecklenburg County, as the work of well-known local builder John Ellis McAuley and an excellently preserved example of rural vernacular architecture, and as part of a rare and pristine rural church complex, the St. Mark's Episcopal Church Rectory remains an important rural resource and a tangible reminder of rural life in Mecklenburg County.

 1. Sherry Joines and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Historic Rural Resources in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1997). Thomas Hanchett, "The Growth of Charlotte: A History" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission), 6-7.

 2. "Survey and Research Report on Hopewell Presbyterian Church" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1977), 1-2.

 3. Ibid.

 4. Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., "History of St. Mark's Mission, Mecklenburg County, NC, from 1883-1885" (unpublished historical sketch, St. Mark's Episcopal Church), 1-3. Marilyn Croteau and Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report on the Thomas and Latitia Gluyas House" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1999).

5. Cheshire, Jr., 2-4. William H. Huffman, "Survey and Research Report on St. Mark's Episcopal Church" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1983), 3.

6. Ibid.

7. Letter written by Reverend Edwin A. Osborne, dated 16 July 1885 (St. Mark's Episcopal Church Records, Huntersville).

8. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 42, located at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds (Charlotte: 1885), 271-272.

9. Huffman, 5-6.

10. Ibid, 5.

11. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 116, located at the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds (Charlotte: 1896), 134.

12. Jack Stewart, interview by Emily Ramsey, July 2001.

13. Catherine W. Bisher, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury and Ernest H. Wood III, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) p.193. Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1984) p. 89-90.

14. Huffman, 9.

15. Ibid, 6. The Historic Landmarks Commission is moving the Ephraim Alexander McAuley House to assure its preservation. Click here for details.

16. Stewart interview.