

## HOPEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



*This report was written on January 5, 1977*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as Hopewell Presbyterian Church is located on Beatties Ford Rd. in the northern section of Mecklenburg County.

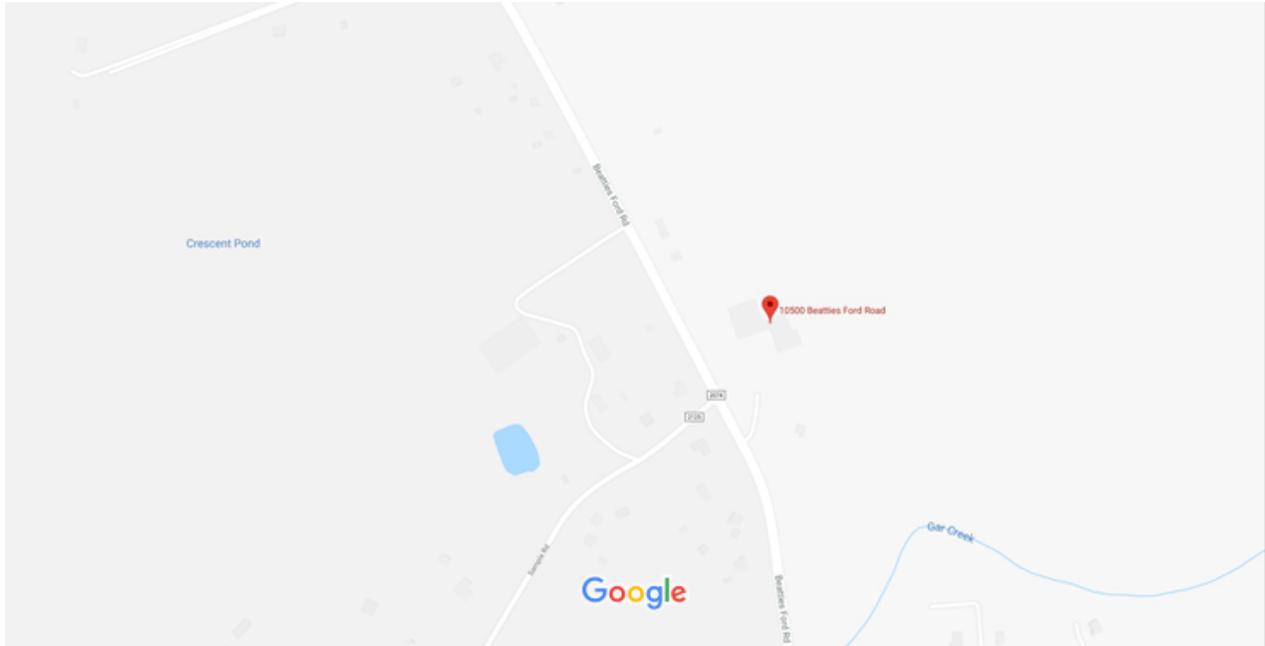
**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner and occupant of the property is:

Hopewell Presbyterian Church  
RFD 3  
Box 441  
Huntersville, NC

Telephone: 875-2291

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

**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 computerized records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office do not contain the most recent deed book reference to this property. However, the original indenture which provided property for purposes of religious activities on this site dates from March 31, 1777. Current information can be acquired by reference to the parcel number of the property (01517109).

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

Hopewell Presbyterian Church is one of the oldest Christian congregations in Mecklenburg County. Indeed, religious services began as early as the 1750s, when itinerate ministers from the Presbyterian Synods of Philadelphia and New York, as well as an occasional evangelist from the back country, preached to the Scotch-Irish settlers. Attracted to the region by the fertile bottom land along the Catawba River, the farmers of Hopewell developed a cotton economy of considerable size and vigor. Coming to Hopewell to worship in its first century were such leaders of the local gentry as John McKnitt Alexander, Major John Davidson and Alexander Caldwell. The burial ground at Hopewell contains the graves of four signers of what according to local tradition was the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

Sometime before 1760 the Hopewell congregation erected its first meeting house a simple log structure. During the Revolutionary War (c. 1777) the log structure gave way to a frame building, which served as the meeting house until the 1830's. In 1833

or shortly thereafter Rev. John Thomson (the first pastor installed at Hopewell had been Samuel Craighead Caldwell in 1792) guided the church through the rigors of build a brick meeting house which according to one estimate was to cost \$3000. That the congregation selected the Federal Style for its new house of worship is not surprising. After all, this was the style which the plantation owners of Hopewell had selected for their homes.

In the late 1850's the brick meeting house was altered. The brick floor was removed; a vestibule and gallery were constructed. The people of Hopewell Presbyterian Church added a pulpit. Additional modifications to the structure have occurred since the Civil War. Nonetheless, enough of the original fabric remains to convey the sense of history and love of heritage which is associated with the congregation today.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A. I. A.

**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:** Hopewell Presbyterian Church is historically and culturally significant for two reasons. First, the meeting house has architectural significance as one of the oldest and finest Federal Style churches in Mecklenburg County. Second, the church is one of the oldest and most respected Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County.

**b. Suitability for preservation and restoration:** The architecture is in good repair and certainly can be preserved in its current configuration. Restoration of the structure would also be possible.

**e. Educational value:** The property has educational value because of its association with events and personalities important in the history of Mecklenburg County. Its architectural importance adds to its educational value.

**d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance or repair:** At present the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Indeed, it is unaware of any intention on the part of the present owners to sell. It assumes that all costs associated with renovating and maintaining the structure 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 structure and property should continue as a place of religious worship.

**f. Appraised value:** The current tax appraisal value of all implements on the property is \$335,180. The current tax appraisal value of the 19.16 acres is \$38,320. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the rate upon which Ad Valorem taxes on the property are calculated.

**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 Hopewell 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 expanded the federal government's recognition of historic properties to include properties of local and state historic significance. Because of its association with events and personalities important in the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, Hopewell Presbyterian has local and regional historic significance and is therefore eligible for inclusion in 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:** Hopewell Presbyterian Church is historically significant to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County for two reasons. First, it is one of the oldest and finest Federal Style churches in Mecklenburg County. Second, it is associated with people and events important in the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

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#### Bibliography

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

Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Plantation World Around Davidson* (1973), pp. 5056.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

**Date of Preparation of this report:** January 5, 1977

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
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## *Architectural Description*

*by Jack O. Boyte*

Encouraged by Gabriel Johnson, Governor of the North Carolina colony during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Scotch emigrants spread rapidly through the North Carolina wilderness west of the Yadkin. Into the Piedmont plateau came hundreds of these freedom loving Presbyterians to settle. Nourished by the fertile and relatively secure Mecklenburg forests and savannas, these people established organized churches even before there were Presbyterian congregations in the earlier frontier towns of Salisbury and Fayetteville. At Hopewell the growing Scotch-Irish community established one of the most important Presbyterian churches in the North Carolina Synod. Joining its sister eighteenth century congregations at Centre and Poplar Tent in north Mecklenburg, Sugaw Creek nearer the village of Charlottetown, Providence to the south near the Waxhaw Indian lands, Rocky River to the east and Steele Creek beside the Catawba River to the west, Hopewell provided social and educational occasions for its members as well as spiritual sustenance.

Early shelter has been described as "a crude log structure," likely a brush tent similar to that said to have been used at Providence. Within a few years the congregation likely built a substantial building resembling the typical skillfully crafted log plantation houses still in evidence in north Mecklenburg. In the issue of Monday, November 22, 1830, the *Miners and Farmers Journal* carried this advertisement:

"Proposals will be received on Thursday, the 6th day of January next at Hopewell church (Mecklenburg County) for building and finishing of a church at said place. The walls to be of brick on stone foundation 43 by 65 feet 20 feet high. The roof to be covered with tin. Arched ceiling. It is contemplated at present to have four doors, 12 windows, 14 by 16 glass and 18 lights each. Door and window sills to be rock, etc."

From this extraordinary document came a late federal building which forms the core section of the present Hopewell Church sanctuary building. Much of this original structure remains, though the church has been slightly modified from time to time. In the 1860's the prospering congregation embarked on a major expansion and renovation program. One change which was made is recorded in the session minutes as a matter of great controversy -- sloping the nave floor. Whatever the debate, the ayes won the argument, for to this day the auditorium floor exhibits a gently sloping

surface -- one which is quite unusual for churches erected in those years. Though now remodeled with modern narrow oak strips, tradition has it that the original floor was square brick with chamfered edges.

Today's Hopewell edifice exhibits characteristics typical of the mid-nineteenth century meeting house architecture and favored by other Mecklenburg Presbyterian congregations of the time. It is likely that the original building of 1830 lacked many of these features and they were added during the expansion of the 1860s.

To the original church, which was one tall rectangular room, a wide narthex was added. Around the sides of the twenty foot high nave a balcony was installed. On the east side high granite steps lead to an exterior door set in a panelled recessed alcove. From here one enters a narrow stairway which rises steeply to one side of the balcony. Benches were here for slaves to attend services. On the opposite side, and probably separated by a simple wood rail, were seats for the congregational overflow.

This part of the balcony was reached by way of a second set of stairs rising at the west side of the narthex. Details in both stairways are severely simple. Treads and risers, as well as some wall surfaces, are hand planed boards with no elaboration. Hand rails are simple rounded members. There is no molded trim here and very little in the balcony. Outside brick walls are covered with plaster, applied irregularly.

The outside walls of the original structure are locally made brick laid in precise Flemish bond with glazed headers. These walls begin on a low random ashlar stone foundation, then rise twenty or more feet to a broad smooth stucco frieze. Above this is an overhang more than two feet wide hand planed from one piece of material and resting on a heavy cyma bed mold. This overhang soffit and bed mold are continuous through the entire length of each side and show no joints, as would likely have occurred had the original building included these architectural features. This wide overhang continues up the gable rake at the front.

Toward the front on each side one can see straight joints in the brick courses where the original corners were. Rising five or six feet above the ground, these joints even show queen closers typical of nineteenth century brick work. Of course the later walls erected in 1860 match this early work closely, including queen closers at the corners.

On each side of the building are four windows which start at granite sills some three feet above the nave floor and rise sixteen or more feet to simple brick heads. Laid in plain Flemish bond on cast iron lintels, these heads show no jack arch or other decorative treatment, a detail which again emphasizes the obvious severity of the earliest building. The windows have triple sash. Top and lower sash have twelve lights each, and the center is glazed with twenty lights. These windows are likely from the 1860 construction period. Details of construction, muntin thickness, and quality of remaining old glass indicate this date is the more accurate. Suspended on

cast iron pintels at each window are louvered wood blinds whose mortise and tenon construction and iron hardware are typical of the mid-nineteenth century.

The 1860 front facade departs strikingly from the primitive simplicity of the original sides. There are three arched openings. Centered in the front, a wide opening contains eight foot high four panelled double doors. Above this entrance are twin windows much like tall transoms, each glazed with six lights. Over this is a fan light arched head, and above are brick soldiers laid on a circle to follow the arch. Surprisingly, these brick are straight units laid in tapered mortar joints to form the circle. At each side, starting on granite sills, are tall narrow two sash windows with curved circular glazing above. Over these windows brick arches are formed with straight headers laid, again, in tapered mortar joints. Recognizing the rough finish appearance of this work and the lack of uniformity in the brick sizes, the builder in 1860 scored each joint with a narrow tool and painted this grapevine joint with white paint to give the allusion of narrow and straight mortar joints. There are vestiges of this original paint still remaining.

While the original instructions to the builder specified a tin roof, the present cover is steep pitched slate tile. Rising from a molded eave, with no original gutter, there are two broad uninterrupted surfaces terminating in a high ridge connecting gable ends.

From the arched main entrance one enters a simple narthex where smooth plaster covers all walls. At the left is the balcony stair of hand finished wood. There is no chair rail. Window and door casing is simple and are edged painted wood. A simple molded cove occurs at the ceiling. The interior partition at the nave is the original thick exterior brick wall which has been plastered to match other interior surfaces. In this wall there are two door openings centered at the side aisles in the nave. These single leaf doors are set in recessed panelled alcoves and still retain the original wood surfaces with bead and quirk panel edges. Doors and cast iron butts are from the 1860 construction, though the original knobs and latches have been replaced.

In the narthex there is one of the original high back pews. Hand fabricated from wide pine planks which still retain characteristic plane marks. This bench is a graphic example of the skill of the craftsman who labored on the church in 1830.

In the meeting room there are many details remaining from the mid-nineteenth century construction and several from the earlier work. Supporting the balcony at each side are three equally spaced tapered round wood columns, obviously hand fabricated, and with simple rounded capitals. The face of the balcony is finished with hand planed wide planks and simple molded edges. The balcony railing consist of repeated thin slats with urn shaped fret work sawn in a regular pattern. Window sills are heavy wooden boards with ovolo edges. Casing is square edged similar to that in the narthex. Wall surfaces and the soffit of the balcony show smooth painted plaster from original construction.

Ceiling and floor surfaces have been refinished, though it is likely that the original ceiling was smooth wood planks which are probably still in place. There have been changes made in the chancel end of the nave which include a new choir alcove, so this portion of the room reflects little of the original conformation. There are doors at the ends of the side aisles which are likely where the original openings occurred. The first plan had four doors, so this appears to conform such a beginning. The early statement that "12 windows are contemplated" indicates that there were likely tall windows overreach of the four outside doors in the original building.

Not part of the church building itself but an important historic architectural element is the delicate hand wrought iron gate still implanted in granite posts a short distance south of the church front. Obviously part of the original loose laid stone wall which at one time enclosed the eighteenth century cemetery, this iron work exhibits extraordinary craftsmanship, and should be carefully preserved. The gate is strikingly similar to hand made gates known to be still in place at the old entrances to the Centre and Providence Cemeteries.

In the history of Mecklenburg County architecture the work of the early Scotch-Irish Presbyterians must be considered among the most influential. At Hopewell is a rare and significant building built by these pioneers. This surviving structure illustrates a number of important architectural features from the second quarter of the nineteenth century and a delightful example of meeting house design.