

## ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH



*This report was written on March 1, 1983*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the St. Mark's Episcopal Church is located on the Mount Holly-Huntersville Road, in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

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

The present owner and occupant of the property is:

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

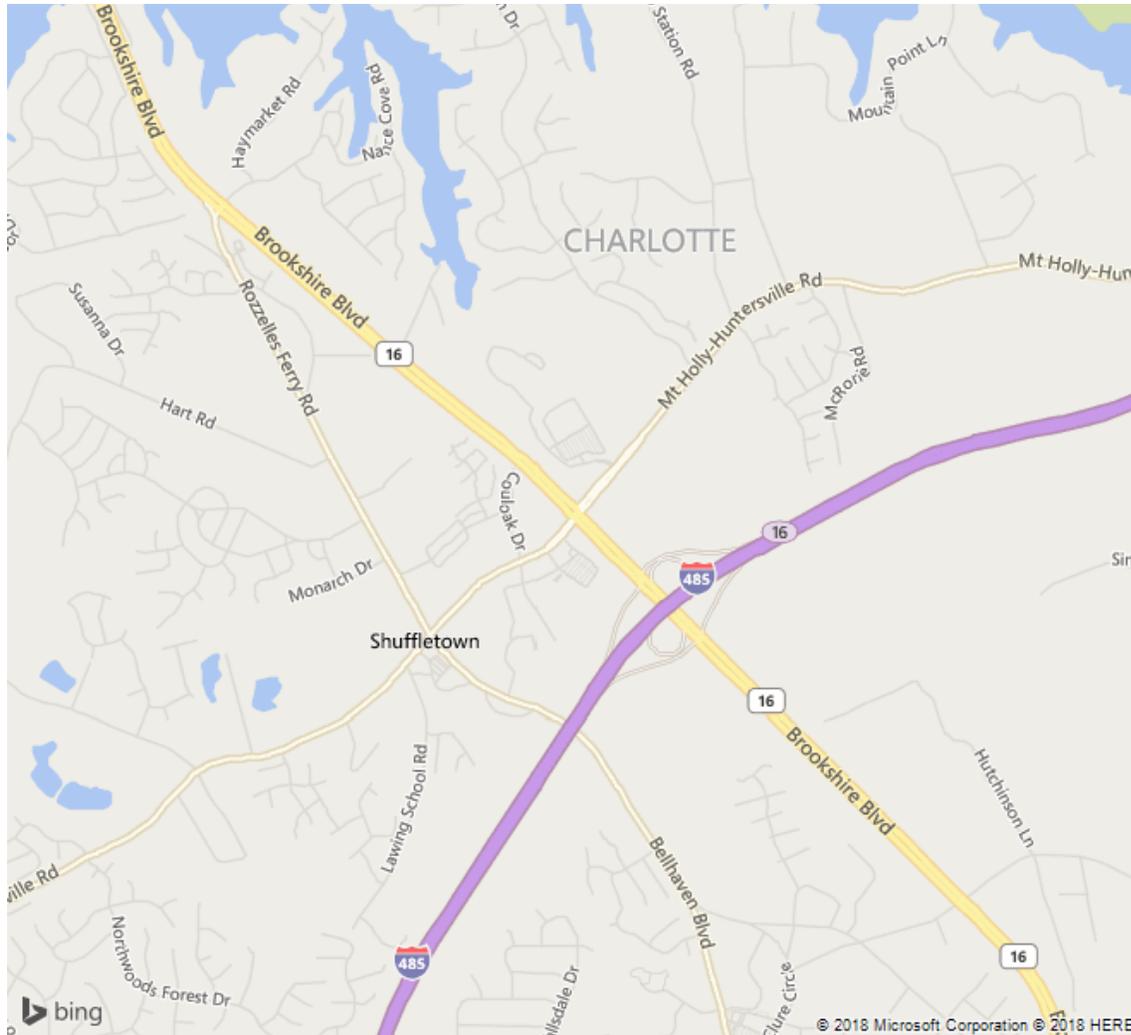
R.F.D. 9 Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road

Charlotte, N.C. 28208

Telephone: (704) 399-5193

**3. Representative photographs 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 which depicts the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1870 at page 119. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 025-161-03.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historic sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett.

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

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as St. Mark's Episcopal Church does possess special

significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) St. Mark's Episcopal Church is the second oldest church of that denomination in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and was an outgrowth of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, the oldest Episcopal congregation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg; 2) the building, erected in 1886-7 by local craftsmen, is an excellent local example of the "English country Gothic" style; 3) in recent years, the members of the church have performed a sensitive restoration of the sanctuary; 4) St. Mark's Episcopal Church retains its essential rural setting, including a burial ground.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:**The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett demonstrates that St. Mark's Episcopal Church meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the 8.68 acres of land is \$30,000. The current appraised value of the building is \$126,390. The total current appraised value is \$156,390. The property is zoned R15.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** March 1, 1983

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
218 N. Tryon Street  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

The Long Creek community, just to the north of Charlotte, is rich in rural history, much of which has remained unstudied and neglected until recently, with the exception of the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. Sitting prominently on the hill overlooking its approaches from the Mount Holly-Huntersville Road, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, in the form of both its buildings and its members, has been an important part of the life of the community. The church began as a result of the interest of a Long Creek farmer, Columbus W. McCoy (1834-?), who had become discontent with the Presbyterian teaching of the Hopewell Church, of which he was a member. A younger acquaintance of his, Reverend Edwin A. Osborne, had captured McCoy's interest by leaving Hopewell and studying for the Episcopalian ministry and subsequently loaning him a

Prayer Book and some other material to study. McCoy had also attended some services at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, and, through a friend, Colonel Hamilton C. Jones, a Charlotte attorney and noted orator, was introduced to the rector of St. Peter's, Reverend Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr. (d.1932) in early 1883. After bringing some friends from the country to some services in Charlotte during the year, McCoy extended an invitation for Reverend Cheshire, who eventually became bishop of the North Carolina diocese, to come preach to a gathering in Long Creek.<sup>1</sup>

Thus on November 18, 1883, after holding his regular Sunday services at 11:00, the Charlotte rector was driven to the country in McCoy's wagon. At 4:30, he preached to a good-sized gathering at the Beech Cliff School House, which was located on the land of Columbus McCoy's brother, Albert McCoy (1843-1925). Impressed by the size and attentiveness of those assembled, Reverend Cheshire preached again the following evening and stayed at Columbus McCoy's home for a few days to become acquainted with some of his neighbors. Four weeks later, on December 16th, the Rector of St. Peter's returned to preach again for two days, but weather and bad roads prevented his further journeys to the country until a Sunday in spring, May 11, 1884. On his next visit of June 29, he proposed to some of the interested participants, including the brothers McCoy, Robert Kerns, James Kirksey, Robert D. Whitley, John Blythe, Captain Thomas Gluyas and others, that they consider joining the church and organizing a Protestant Episcopal congregation. At services on the following July 26, Reverend Cheshire announced to the group that he intended to have a series of services lasting several days in the middle of the following month.<sup>2</sup>

Assisted by Reverend George Wetmore and Reverend Edwin Osborne (who had first interested Columbus McCoy in the church), the Reverend Joseph Blount Cheshire went to Long Creek on Tuesday, August 11, with the intention of holding services through Friday. There they were met an hour before the services by a number of people who strongly urged them to stay through Sunday, which Cheshire and Osborne agreed to do while Wetmore returned to look after St. Peter's in Charlotte. For every service they were greeted by large congregations, at times too numerous for the one-room schoolhouse which housed them, and the gathering seemed particularly moved by the earnest and straightforward preaching style of Reverend Osborne. At the high point of this eventful series on Sunday, a meeting was held of those interested in forming a congregation, and the following petition to the Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina was drawn up:

We, whose names are here underwritten, desire to be organized into a congregation of St. Mark's Chapel; and we do hereby agree to be governed by the Constitution and Canons of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and of the Diocese of North Carolina. Done at Beech Cliff School House, Long Creek Township, Mecklenburg County, N.C., August 17th, 1884, being the Tenth Sunday after Trinity. (Signed)

C. W. McCoy  
Thos. Gluyas  
A. McCoy  
W. D. Jamison  
W. D. Price

N. J. Price  
L. F. Jamison  
R. V. Kerns  
R. D. Whitley  
Maria Davis  
Jennie D. Alexander

In addition to the above, John N. Blythe, Robert W. Blythe, Mrs. Mary C. McCoy, James S. Kirksey and Benjamin W. Houston also wanted to be among the original members as soon as they could get a certificate of dismissal from the Hopewell Presbyterian Church.<sup>3</sup> The following October 24th, the Bishop came from Raleigh, preached the sermon, confirmed sixteen communicants into the church (making nineteen in all), and received another petition from the congregation. The next day, Bishop Lyman issued their founding document:

Application having been made to me by several members of the Church, residing in Long Creek Township, in the County of Mecklenburg, and state and Diocese of North Carolina, requesting the organization of a Mission in said township, agreeably with the provisions of Section 2, Canon XII of said Diocese: Now therefore be it known to the Faithful in Christ Jesus that I have organized and by these present, do organize, a Mission as desired, the same to be known as St. Mark's Mission, and I do further appoint the following persons as officers of the same, to wit: John N. Blythe-Warden, and Thomas Gluyas-Treasurer. Given my hand in the city of Charlotte, this twenty-fifth day of October in the year of our Lord 1884.  
(Signed) Theodore B. Lyman  
Bishop of North Carolina

Attest: Jos. Blount Cheshire, Jr.  
Minister in charge said Mission

In addition, Columbus W. McCoy was also commissioned to be the lay leader of the congregation. The name St. Mark's was suggested by Reverend Cheshire and Reverend Osborne, because of the Biblical association of St. Mark and St. Peter as companions, which could represent a like association between the two Mecklenburg churches. Also at the October 24th meeting, it was requested informally that the Bishop consider appointing Reverend Edwin A. Osborne to be in charge of the mission, and \$300.00 was promised toward his support for the first year. Everyone involved subsequently agreed to this arrangement, and the Reverend Osborne took over from Reverend Cheshire on January 1, 1885.

Edwin Augustus Osborne (1837-1926) led a full and eventful life. His youth was spent with his pioneer father, Dr. Ephriam Brevard Osborne (who fought with Andrew Jackson in New Orleans) in Alabama, Arkansas and Texas, but at the age of 22, he returned to North Carolina, the home of his ancestors. Two years later, he entered the Civil War as the Captain of an Iredell County Company, and eventually rose to the rank of Colonel through much gallantry in action and despite being wounded a number of times. At war's end, in 1865, he married Fannie Swan Moore (who was descended from Colonial South Carolina's Governor James Moore and General

Maurice Moore, a Revolutionary War hero), and became a lawyer. He subsequently secured the post of Clerk of the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County, which he held for about ten years before resigning to enter the ministry. After ordination as a deacon in 1877, he began his ministry at a small salary in Fletcher, North Carolina. Reverend Osborne served at St. Mark's from 1885-91, 1892-95, 1896-98, 1900-04, 1906-09, and 1910 and established the Thompson Orphanage and Training Institution, of which he was Superintendent for ten years, in 1887.<sup>5</sup> After six months labor with his new charge, in July, 1885, Reverend Osborne provided some insights to the struggles of the new church:

"I found the little flock anxiously awaiting me, and full of zeal and hope. My heart almost failed me as I thought of the trials and tribulations and hardships that await them, and also of the probable disappointments, for they expected a rapid growth in members, and depended largely upon my personal influence in the community to give strength and popularity to the cause. But I know how difficult it would be to overcome the prejudice and opposition of the community against the church, and that in all probability our growth would be slow for at least a number of years... And now after six months, I write the fulfillments of these forebodings though I am thankful to say that the Lord has given some indication of his favor to the work, by adding six other adult persons and several inputs to our ranks. But the opposition to the work is very strong and very bitter. Every influence that can be brought to bear against us is used, and I hear much misrepresentations being used. Still our members have so far, with only one exception, been faithful, and patient, and true, and I thank God for many indications of a healthy and permanent growth. Our members have been strengthened and united by the persecution which they have sustained, and I trust that the opposition itself has been weakened by the calm and judicious bearing of our members."<sup>6</sup>

Just under four months after the mission was started, in February, 1885, two large landowners, who are now church members, sold a total of two and one-quarter acres of choice hilltop land for a modest sum to the church trustees: Robert D. and Martha McCoy Whitley, and Benjamin and Dovey Houston (see attached map).<sup>7</sup> Robert Davidson Whitley (1820-1900), who was Columbus McCoy brother-in-law, owned over three hundred acres south of the church property along Beatties Ford Road, including the Long Creek Mill, sometimes known as Whitley's Mill, on Long Creek. The foundation of the mill, the mill race, and the ruins of the miller's house are still extant <sup>8</sup>

Thus early on, the members of the new church were interested in putting up their own house of worship. The drive to raise money went on in 1885 and 1886, but the early church minutes show that the effort received a major setback in the middle of 1886 because of severe rains which almost totally destroyed the crops in the area.<sup>9</sup> By October, however, there was great hope of beginning the work. Reverend Cheshire had been working at St. Peter's in Charlotte to help raise funds, and went to a General Convention in Chicago with the understanding that the work would get under way in a week or ten days. While there, he received a letter from R. D. Whitley explaining that Reverend Osborne was disappointed about the level of funds received, and wanted to postpone construction until the spring, which Whitley thought would be disastrous for the momentum thus far achieved. Cheshire immediately wired Whitley to proceed thus: "Go

ahead, and I will be responsible." When the Reverend Mr. Osborne read it, he wanted to know exactly what it meant, but Whitley assured him it meant what it said, and so the plans went forward.<sup>10</sup>

On October 21, 1886, a contract was given to J. F. Grady to construct the church for \$770.00. The contractor, Joseph Free Grady, Sr. (1851-1929) was a local resident who moved to Charlotte in 1888 and became a prominent builder there. Among other projects, he built some of the first houses in Dilworth for the 4-C's (Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company) and also built a number of fine homes in the city and neighboring counties.<sup>11</sup> The church contract called for all of the material to be furnished by a committee of the church, except the door and window frames, doors, sash, putty, glass and lights.<sup>12</sup> All the bricks were made at the bottom of the hill from the church at the creek branch by John Ellis McAuley (1861-1929), a "country carpenter" who built a number of one- and two-story frame houses in the area of similar pattern (including the old church rectory about 1897-8).<sup>13</sup>

Starting out with clay from the creek bank which was shaped in wooden molds (one of which is still extant), the twenty-five-year-old McAuley fired the brick in a kiln put up on the hillside above the creek. In addition to severe rains, 1886 also brought an earthquake which destroyed McAuley's kiln and a number of his bricks, wiping out any profit he hoped to make. But with Reverend Cheshire's backing, he reconstructed a crude (and dangerous) kiln of an old steam boiler encased in brick, which he used without a steam pressure gauge, and proceeded to finish the job of making all the handsome brick for the church. The cornerstone, carved by W. D. Price, a parishioner, was laid on October 28, and contains a copy of the Bible, the Prayer Book, copies of the "Churchman," "Living Church," and "Church Messenger," as well as a short history of the mission to that time, including the names of the active church members.<sup>15</sup> On the following March 27, 1887, the first service was held in the new brick church. On that date Reverend Osborne wrote:

...(the church) has been erected by the earnest efforts of the members, assisted by means furnished by friends of the cause in Charlotte and other parts of the state, and some who lived in the North. The latter contributions were made through Bishop Lyman.

In July, 1887, Colonel Hamilton C. Jones gave the country church an altar, and about January, 1891, it was plastered, wainscoted, oiled, and painted, and a rood screen (no longer extant), was built. The first class was confirmed by Reverend (later Bishop) Cheshire at St. Mark's December 7, 1893, and in 1895 and 1896, the chancel rail was put up, and the prayer desk, credence table (shelf) and Rector's (or Bishop's) chair were purchased. Consecration of the church building took place on May 10, 1896, after all indebtedness was taken care of.<sup>17</sup>

Through the years since its beginning, St. Mark's has remained a small rural parish, mostly serving descendants of the original families. Indeed, it was removed from mission status only about 1960. It has, however, remained a significant part of the Long Creek community. As mentioned above, a two-story frame rectory was built about 1897 or 1898 by John Ellis McAuley on land donated by the Whitleys and Justice Heriot Clarkson and his wife, Mary Osborne

Clarkson.<sup>18</sup> In 1954, a church classroom and activities building was added to the site near the church. More recently, the church itself was, in 1980, restored to much of its original state through efforts led by Mr. Frank Penninger, and the interior furniture was restored by Mr. Banks Blythe. One can still picture St. Mark's as part of a late nineteenth-century flourishing rural community. The charming "country gothic" church sat high on the hill overlooking the sand-clay road from Mount Holly to Huntersville, and nearby was the rectory (which was also used as a meeting hall by the Masons)<sup>20</sup> and the miller's house. Southward down at Long Creek was the mill, powered by water in the long mill race, and across the creek was the country store. The elegance and simplicity of the structure itself easily reminds us of a simpler life of a century ago, and the names associated with the church constitute an important part of the history of the Long Creek community and Mecklenburg County.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "History of St. Mark's Mission, Mecklenburg County, NC, from 1883-1885," by Jos. Blount Cheshire, Jr. Unpublished historical sketch in church records, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 5; "Address of Justice Heriot Clarkson, Unveiling at St. Mark's Church, Memorial Tablet to Rt. Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., and Rev. Edwin Augustus Osborne, Sunday, November 26th, 1933." Typewritten copy of address, pp. 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> Typewritten copy of church records, dated 16 July 1885.

<sup>7</sup> Deed book 42, p. 271; Ibid., p. 272; 16 Feb. 1885.

<sup>8</sup> Survey of R. D. Whitley estate land by T. B. Spratt, dated April 1926. Interview and site visit with Mary Ellen Droppers, and Rev. Tom Droppers, Rector of St. Mark's.

<sup>9</sup> Typewritten copy of St. Mark's Church minutes, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Jos. Blount Cheshire, *St. Mark's Church: Its Beginnings, 1884-1886* (N. P., August, 1927), pp. 23-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, October 12, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> See note 9.

<sup>13</sup> Charles W. Sommerville, *The History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church*, (Charlotte: Hopewell Presbyterian Church, 1939), pp. 156-9; interview with the Droppers, note 8.

<sup>14</sup> Sommerville, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Typewritten copy of church minutes, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Gluyas, "The Beginning of St. Mark's Church", unpublished sketch from church minutes, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Deed Book 116, p. 134, 14 December 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with the Droppers, note 8; *Mecklenburg Gazette*, October 9, 1980. p.?

<sup>20</sup> Deed Book 127, p.41, 16 April 1898.

### *Architectural Description*

*Thomas W. Hanchett*

St. Mark's Episcopal is a well preserved example of a small rural "English country Gothic" style church. It was built of handmade red brick by local craftsmen in 1886-1887. Today, sited atop a tree covered hill with its parsonage and graveyard, near an old country crossroad, it looks much as it must have at the turn of the century. The Gothic style has long been associated with the Episcopal Church in America, because this was the chief ecclesiastical style in England when King Henry VIII created the denomination. Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire, who oversaw the creation of St. Mark's, had a strong interest in church architecture and in his later years wrote an essay touching on the development of the Gothic in the United States ("St. Peter's Church, Charlotte, Historical Addresses," 1921):

"Church architecture in America ... took its rise in the study of the Gothic architecture of our mother Church of England.... The pointed arch, the long nave, the sharp roof with its open timber construction ... -- these and other characteristics of the Gothic style have come to be commonly understood as denoting a building intended for ecclesiastical purposes; and almost all

denominations making any attempts at churchly effect in their buildings have followed our lead...."

According to Cheshire the style had been introduced by a Bishop Hopkins, who built the 1825 Trinity Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the first "purely Gothic" chapel in the United States, based on an English pattern book. In 1836 Hopkins had published his own "Essay on Gothic Architecture ... designed chiefly for the Clergy." It contained lithographed church plans and details by Hopkins, as well as illustrations of notable English churches. Cheshire owned a copy of Hopkins' book. With the long Episcopal tradition of Gothic design, and with Gothic enthusiast Cheshire in charge of fund raising, it is not surprising that St. Mark's is a good example of the style. It has a cross-shaped plan with a three-bay-long nave, a pair of small single-bay side wings, and a one-bay chancel. Roofs are characteristically steep pitched, flaring outward at the eaves. Old photos show that the roofs were covered with wood shingles. Today's roof is of similar appearing grey composition shingles. Each bay has a simple eight-pane lancet window, with no tracery, set in a Gothic pointed arched opening. Many of the panes still have original handblown wavy glass. Behind the altar is a large three-part window with tracery and a compound arch. Stained glass was added in the chancel windows in the 1960s, and some panes bear the names of their contributors.

The church has three entrances, the main one at the end of the nave and smaller doors in the two wings. Each is set deep into a pointed arched opening. They are heavy double doors built up of wood and have elaborate cast metal hinges. In the 1960s each pair of doors was nailed together and rehinged to form a single panel. Walls of the church are of handsome red brick handmade at the site by John Ellis McAuley. One of the molds used to make the bricks still exists, a wooden form that held two bricks at once. The brick bond of the walls alternates a row of headers with five rows of stretchers. Single pilasters delineate each bay and emphasize the corners of the structure. A water table steps out from the main walls at the base of the building. The brick chimney nestled next to the southwest wing was added after the structure was built. The interior of the nave is dominated by the chamfered-beam open truss that supports the roof. Walls are of smooth white plaster with wooden tongue-and-groove wainscoting. The space accommodates a dozen rows of pews on each side of a center aisle. Where the side wings join the nave there is a hint of the Victorian decoration popular for residences in the period. Simple wooden columns are topped by scroll-sawn brackets and arch-shaped trim.

The work is somewhat similar to the porch trim of the nearby parsonage built by John Ellis McAuley in the late 1890s, and it may be that he is responsible for this decoration in the church. Today one side wing contains additional pews, while the other is partially closed off to hold storage cabinets and a sink. The chancel is raised slightly above the main floor of the church. Its elaborate wooden rood screen and some other woodwork were removed in a 1950s "modernization." The walnut communion and original credence tables were put back in 1980 along with the old Bishop's chair, supplemented by a new pulpit and prayer desks by local craftsman Banks Blythe. The work was directed by parishioner Frank Penneger, who also stripped white paint from all the interior wainscoting and woodwork, and painted the church's exterior trim a subdued Victorian red, suggested by early photos. The setting of St. Mark's is an important part of its architectural appeal. The chapel sits on a wooded knoll above the Mount Holly-Hunterville Road, near its intersection with Beatties Ford Road. Both of these two lane

roads have been important highways through the rolling farmland of north Mecklenburg County since the early nineteenth century. Stepping down one slope of the hill below the church is the graveyard, its white stones marked with the names of the founding families of this rural community. The chapel is not oriented to the points of the compass. Its nave entrance faces northwest. Behind the church is John McAuley's wood-frame parsonage. Its two-story L-shaped form and its Victorian doorway and porch trim are similar to a half dozen other farmhouses McAuley built in north Mecklenburg County, according to Mary Ellen Droppers, wife of St. Mark's current pastor. At one time the Mount Holly-Huntersville Road ran over the hill between the church and the parsonage, rather than at the foot of the hill in front of the church as it does today. Traces of the old roadbed can still be seen at the edges of the property. The rough wooden building that served as St. Mark's school was located northeast of the church along this road before it was demolished. Today a one story brick fellowship hall erected in the mid 1950s blocks the old roadbed just southwest of the church.