

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Brown Marsh Presbyterian Church
AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Southeast side of S.R. 1700, 0.1 mile south of junction with
S.R. 1762, near Brown Marsh
CITY, TOWN Clarkton
STATE North Carolina
VICINITY OF CODE 37
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 3rd
COUNTY CODE Bladen 017

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Wilmington Presbytery
STREET & NUMBER
15th and Market streets
CITY, TOWN
Wilmington
VICINITY OF
STATE
North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Bladen County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN
Elizabethtown
STATE
North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
DATE
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Brown Marsh Presbyterian Church, a small frame building, is located on a knoll above Brown Marsh Creek in a grove of oak and cedar trees. A graveyard containing about 200 gravestones, with the oldest inscribed stone dated 1786, encircles the church. The weathered, extremely plain rectangular building, five bays wide and three deep, rests on a low brick foundation and is capped by a gable roof covered with wooden shingles.

The building shows no sign of having ever been painted, and the wood surfaces have developed a mossy patina. Some of the siding is beaded; the rest is plain. The north side and west gable-end elevations each contain a central entrance, and it is unclear which served originally as the main facade. The north entrance, which appears to be the earliest, consists of a batten door in a plain surround. The west entrance is a double door, each leaf with three raised panels, surmounted by a two-pane transom and set in a plain surround. The flanking bays of these elevations and the south and east elevations contain nine-over-nine sash windows with plain surrounds, each covered with a batten shutter. Most of the shutters have HL hinges. The eaves are finished quite simply, with a plain box cornice enclosing the longitudinal eaves and a plain flush raking cornice finishing the gable ends.

The interior contains one large room with the pulpit centered against the east wall and a gallery abutting the west wall. All of the interior surfaces are covered with unpainted flush wood sheathing. The wide, beaded ceiling sheathing is perhaps original, for the inscription "Thos. Sheridan 1828" (or 1818) is written in chalk on the ceiling in the northeast corner. According to church tradition this is the signature of the carpenter and the construction date of the building. The walls are covered with narrow sheathing which is apparently a late nineteenth century replacement. It is arranged vertically below a plain chair rail and horizontally above the wainscot. Wide plain boards form the floor.

The pulpit, which appears to be quite old, is a high, polygonal, three-sided box constructed of wide beaded sheathing like that of the ceiling. A small shelf at the top forms the lectern, and the top edge of the pulpit is finished with a molding. Three small wooden steps on the south side of the pulpit ascend to the standing platform. The pews consist of crude plank benches with slat backs which appear to be of recent vintage. They are arranged loosely in two rows with an east-west and a north-south center aisle. The benches in the west half of the building face east, toward the pulpit, and the benches flanking the pulpit face inward to the pulpit. In the center of the north-south aisle is a Victorian cast-iron stove with a metal flue which exits through the south wall to the outside.

The gallery is supported on plain wood posts, and narrow, vertical sheathing like that of the walls forms the gallery railing. A narrow open-string stair ascends in the southwest corner to the gallery. The newness of the gallery fabric and the constriction of gallery space due to the low ceiling height indicate that it is a later addition.

Around the church is a picturesque churchyard, with several noteworthy tombstones. The oldest grave marker, of "John Gessep" dated 1786, is an upright granite slab with

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with an arched top. A primitive, stylized male head with wings ornaments the arched area above the inscription, and panels of stylized acanthus ornament flank the inscription. The stone is typical of eighteenth century New England gravestones, and is highly unusual for North Carolina. A large number of unpainted uninscribed wooden markers in varying shapes, the basic form being a rectangular wooden slab surmounted by a lozenge shaped or round-arched finial, are found in the cemetery. The signs of weathering indicate that these markers are very old. These early, anonymous markers are found throughout Bladen County.

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The congregation of Brown Marsh Presbyterian Church, like others in the area, was composed largely of descendants of the Scots settlers who dominated the Upper Cape Fear Valley numerically and culturally. After the Scots defeat at Culloden, pardon was offered to rebels who would take an oath of allegiance and emigrate to America. The largest number of these went to North Carolina, settling primarily along the Upper Cape Fear; they were in fact the only large group to come to North Carolina directly from their native land. The names recorded in the Brown Marsh congregation's marriage roster suggest their Scots character: Neill McKay and Katherine Ray (1815), Neill MacColl and Mary MacNeill (1816), George Ballantine and Ann MacColl (1818), Dougald MacKeithan and Mary McColl (1819), Angus Clark and Flora McKeithan (1821), Archibald Shaw and Mary Campbell (1822), and others.

The 1828 Brown Marsh chapel remained in continuous use until 1871, when a new house of worship was constructed closer to Clarkton. The congregation's session resolved to "instruct the Trustees of Brown Marsh Church to close the old Brown Marsh Edifice, which is now open, and fasten the same with lock & key, and suffer no person . . . to occupy or use the same without lieve of this Session." This action produced a rift in the congregation and some members continued to worship in the old chapel until 1873. The old church building was apparently then vacated.

In the autumn of 1885 the new church's name was changed from Brown Marsh to Clarkton Presbyterian Church. In October, 1910, Oscar L. Clark and his wife Cora conveyed to the trustees of Clarkton Presbyterian Church a one-acre lot in the town of Clarkton "for the purpose of erecting Presbyterian Church on same." The new building was "practically completed" by the autumn of 1911. In November, 1911, the 1828 Brown Marsh chapel was reopened to a newly-formed congregation. Several members of the Clarkton Presbyterian Church became members of this new congregation, which remained in existence until 1949. Whether it met in the old Brown Marsh chapel during this entire period is uncertain; the building has remained vacant since that time but is preserved by the region's Presbyterians.

A full inventory of Bladen County revealed that Brown Marsh is the oldest church building there, among the earliest extant structures in the county, and perhaps the chief early landmark connected with the Scots Presbyterians vital to the area's history.

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"Historical Sketch of Clarkton Presbyterian Church." Unpublished, 1921.

Saunders, William L., ed. The Colonial Records of North Carolina. Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890.

Stone, Robert Hamlin. A History of Orange Presbytery, 1770-1970. Greensboro: By the Author, 1970.

United States Census Office. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Bladen County, North Carolina. Population Schedule.

Wilmington Morning Star, City Edition. "Church celebrates 175th anniversary," September 24, 1970.

