

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bethel Church Arbor

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number East side of SR 1123 at its intersection with SR 1121 ^{N/A} not for publication

city or town Midland vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Cabarrus code 025 zip code 28107

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stephen J. Crow SHPD 4/17/97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other. (explain:)	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Bethel Church Arbor

Cabarrus, North Carolina

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
1	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Post and beam

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof Metal

other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

third quarter nineteenth century - 1947

Significant Dates

third quarter nineteenth century

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Bethel Church Arbor
Name of Property

Cabarrus, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	17	542150	3899650
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sue G. Russell

organization _____ date January 31, 1997

street & number 473 Tehama Street #3 telephone (415) 974-5167

city or town San Francisco, state CA zip code 94103

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Bethel United Methodist Church

street & number 12700 Idlebrook Road telephone _____

city or town Midland state NC zip code 28107

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 7.1Bethel Church Arbor
Cabarrus County, N.C.

Narrative description

Bethel Church Arbor is a large, open, timber-framed structure located in the Cabarrus community of rural Township Ten or "Midland" Township. The Arbor and related buildings are sited on a ten-acre church campus which lies within a triangular-shaped tract bounded by Idlebrook, Midland and Bethel Church Roads. Only the Arbor and its immediate surroundings are included in the nomination. To the northwest of the Arbor, separated by a parking lot, is a Gothic Revival sanctuary erected in 1922. To the west are a fellowship hall (1957) and an educational building of modern vintage (1987). The church parsonage (1947) lies several hundred feet east of the Arbor. To the north across narrow Idlebrook Road lies a mid-nineteenth century cemetery. The cemetery covers seven acres, includes 1,130 graves and is still in use today. While the exact year of the Arbor's construction is unknown, the campgrounds are referenced in an 1878 issue of the *Carolina Watchman*, a local newspaper.¹ The Arbor itself is referenced in 1912 when the church conference passed a resolution that same year "prohibiting the use of the arbor for a stable."²

The Arbor is a commanding structure dominated by a dramatic, metal-clad hipped roof with flared eaves which reveals itself gradually to the motorist upon entering gently rising Idlebrook Road at the western end of the property. At first, only the roof is visible but upon drawing nearer, the entire structure comes into view, dominating the landscape. No longer standing are the small cabins or "tents" which ringed the Arbor, the last of which was removed in the 1920s.³ The tract's immediate vicinity is still mostly rural and undeveloped. It is sited at the juncture of two secondary roads, SR 1123 and 1121, each running south of NC Highway 24/27, currently being widened from two to four lanes to accommodate development pushing out from the Charlotte metropolitan area.

The Arbor is sheltered by a high, hip roof with flared eaves of standing seam metal over board sheeting laid on rafters. The axis of the roof runs north and south and its flared eaves create a deep overhang to shelter the interior area. Rectangular in shape, the Arbor measures seventy-four by fifty-seven feet. Typical of nineteenth-century arbors, the entire framing system is open to view. It appears to have been built in two stages. The inner, original portion is three bays wide by five bays deep with a frame of oak timbers apparently dressed with an adz. The outer portion, consisting of a single bay running the building's perimeter, is composed of timbers dressed with a circular saw. Each section of the structure is supported by posts, both driven into the ground and resting on large rock bases. The heavy timbers supporting the roof are beams attached with mortise and tenon joints that are further secured with wooden pegs. Additional

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Bethel Church Arbor
Cabarrus County, N.C.

support is provided by diagonal braces on each of the Arbor's four sides, all of which are unsheathed.

The simplicity of the Arbor's exterior is echoed on the interior. The sawdust-covered dirt floor and the sense of openness created by the exposed roof truss system set the tone for the rest of the features. Wooden pews, constructed of plain planks for seat and backrests, are nailed to board runners on the floor for stability. Some are nailed to interior posts. The sixteen rows of pews are arranged in a nave plan. The rows are divided into thirds with two aisles, one on each side of the inner third section.

A wooden speaker's platform rises at the southern end of the Arbor. Reserved for speakers and singing choirs, it is stage-like in construction, boxed with vertical boarding, and elevated several steps above ground level. Six rows of choir benches and a simple wooden pulpit sit on the southeastern corner. Several rows of benches, placed at a right angle to the main body of seating, sit ground level facing the platform.

Bethel Church Arbor retains a high degree of integrity regarding its location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The structure is well maintained and few changes have occurred since its construction. Overhead fans, lights and an amplification system were installed in the 1930s after a rural electrification project was conducted in the area. ⁴

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Cabarrus County, N.C.**Statement of significance****Summary**

Bethel Church Arbor is a large and impressive timber-framed structure built as a religious shelter for camp meetings. Its exact construction date is not known but a local newspaper referred to the campgrounds in 1878 and the structure's use is first documented in 1912. One of only two surviving arbors in Cabarrus County, it is architecturally significant as an excellent representation of the small remaining number of religious arbors built in rural Piedmont North Carolina during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bethel Church Arbor is also significant for its association with the religious and social history of the area. By 1802, the expansion of Methodism in the Cabarrus County area was furthered by a great religious revival, spreading throughout the entire area between the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers. The camp meeting was the vehicle by which this expansion occurred and Bethel Arbor is a part of this tradition. Its original use was to house annual week-long camp meeting revivals held typically in August. Later in the twentieth century, Bethel Arbor was the scene of special services, meetings and events, for both Bethel Church and the Midland Community as a whole. Older parishioners have childhood memories of the Arbor as voting place in the 1920s. Due to its architectural prominence and its continued role as a community social and religious center, Bethel Church Arbor's period of significance begins with its construction during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and ends in 1947, the last year in which it meets the fifty-year requirement for National Register eligibility. Although Bethel Church Arbor is a religious property, it meets Criterion Consideration A because it derives its significance from its architectural distinction, as well as from its importance to the combined social and religious history of the area.

Historic Context: Architecture

Bethel Church Arbor is both an excellent and well-preserved example of a nineteenth-century religious arbor in Piedmont North Carolina. It is architecturally similar to the remaining dozen or so arbors in the region and particularly comparable to historic Ball's Creek, a circa-1853 Methodist camp meeting site in southeastern Catawba County. A square, open pole structure approximately eighty by one hundred feet, Ball's Creek Arbor is also sheltered by a pyramidal roof covered with raised-seam metal roofing. It is open on three sides with the exception of the western side which is protected by a frame wall. Inside the wall is an elevated, wooden platform, where a low rail contains the pulpit. To the north of the pulpit are choir pews. Facing the pulpit are three rows of wooden benches, set up like church pews. ⁵

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Cabarrus County, N.C.

In Cabarrus County, Bethel is one of only two surviving arbors. The other, built by African Americans at Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Church, is located less than one mile north of Bethel on SR 1123. While the two Arbors are very similar in appearance and construction, Ebenezer Arbor is much smaller in scale and lacks the mortise and tenon joinery found at Bethel. The similarity in style is likely attributable to the fact that prior to the Civil War, many of the white Methodist camp meeting worshippers took their slaves to camp meetings, to both help with the setup and cooking and to further their spiritual education. After the war, however, free blacks were no longer openly accepted at white camp meetings. As a result, black campgrounds emerged based on the doctrines of the African Methodist Episcopal church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The aforementioned Ball's Creek Campground clearly influenced the design of that Catawba County's first black campground, Mott's Grove Campground founded in 1870. Its second black campground, McKenzie's Grove founded in 1875, originally called itself the "Balls Creek Campground of the A.M.E. Zion Church."⁶ The plans of their grounds and structures are modeled after Balls Creek just as Ebenezer Arbor is modeled after that of Bethel's.

The construction date of Ebenezer Arbor is also unknown but local tradition recalls that camp meetings took place at the site prior to the founding of Ebenezer Church in 1883. As with the Bethel Church Arbor, unhewn log posts and sawn planks support the Ebenezer Church Arbor, and both are sheltered under broad hip roofs resting on a set of sawn planks. The log support posts divide the interior seating into three sections: pews from the congregations second of three churches (erected in 1900) occupy the center section. In each of the flanking sections, are board seats supported by planks running the length of the Arbor between the log posts.⁷

The typical camp meeting ground was set in a rural location with ample shade and fresh water. Held in late summer or early fall after the crops had been "laid by," camp meetings typically lasted at least a week with rows of "tents" or small wooden cabins about the periphery of the camp grounds. These cabins were small, log buildings with the rear used as a sleeping area with a small space in front reserved for cooking. Some sites featured plank platforms or "streets" covered with straw radiating out from the arbor to the encircling cabins. At the center of the campground was the arbor, an open air timber-framed shelter with a sawdust or dirt floor which provided shade to the parishioners during prayer meetings and sermons. Most surviving arbors have hipped roofs as does the Bethel Arbor. A simple pulpit was positioned in the front of the arbor and the remainder filled with rustic benches or pews.⁸ Although Bethel Arbor is presently surrounded by latter day construction, it originally followed the camp ground pattern - a centrally located arbor overlooked by shade trees and ringed by wooden tents.

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Cabarrus County, N.C.**Historic Context: Religion and Social History**

The Methodists were the last Protestant sect to appear in colonial North Carolina. Originating as a reform movement within the Church of England, Methodism had no organization as a distinct church until after the Revolutionary War. George Whitefield, the great oratorical preacher, came to North Carolina several times between 1739 and 1765 to preach the doctrines of the "Methodist Society" to the Americans. The decade of the 1770s saw the fervor and spread of Methodism continue to increase with the organization of "Methodist Societies" in North Carolina as well as Virginia.⁹

By 1802, the flame of Methodism in the Cabarrus County area was fanned by a great religious revival which spread throughout the entire area between the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers. While the camp meeting had its origin within the Presbyterian Church, it was the Methodists who carried it to its greatest fruition. Men like William Ormond, James Patterson and John McGee preached at meetings all over the Yadkin Valley. Orators such as Daniel Asbury and James Jenkins brought entire pioneer families on journeys as much as one hundred miles to share in the experience. Families camped out for four or five days in makeshift tents. Only later did permanent shelter begin to be erected by church organizations.¹⁰ Bethel Arbor is a part of this tradition. The Bethel camp meeting grounds are referenced in an 1878 newspaper article as "famous old campgrounds" with a history of fifty years of use.¹¹ Although camp meetings are no longer held there, parishioners continue to assemble in the Arbor for annual homecoming the second week of August, recalling the traditional late August camp meeting dates.

The rise and continued popularity of the camp meeting in Piedmont North Carolina can be attributed to several factors. Piedmont populations were sparse and roads were few and poor. Thus, camping at one site for a week gave people an opportunity to worship at one place together. The camp meeting grounds also provided a stage for experienced orators and a forum for both creating converts and organizing new churches. The camp meetings also provided an opportunity for the clergy to meet with their colleagues and share ideas.¹²

The camp meeting also provided an important social nexus. It gave friends and acquaintances an opportunity to meet annually. Young people often formed romantic liaisons. Far-flung families had the opportunity to reunite. And for all attending, the camp meeting offered a deeply moving communal religious experience.¹³

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Cabarrus County, N.C.

Other camp meeting sites that contributed to the religious development of the Piedmont are Ball's Creek (Methodist), Mott's Grove (A.M.E.), and McKenzies's Grove (A.M.E. Zion) in Catawba County; Tucker's Grove and St. Matthew's in Lincoln County; Pleasant Grove and Prospect in Union County; Center, Little John's and Mount Pleasant in Caldwell County; Marvin in Burke County; Love Joy in Montgomery County; Asbury, Reem's Creek and Turkey Creek in Buncombe County; and Center (Methodist) in Davie County.¹⁴

Historical Background

The history of Bethel Church Arbor is a part of the history of the Bethel Methodist Church. Bethel is the earliest documented seat of Methodism in Cabarrus County. An old church register which appears to have been copied from an earlier roll shows a congregation in existence as early as 1783. It is a matter of record that one Margaret McClellan was accepted into the Church during this year and most historians note 1780 as its seminal year. It is possible the founder of American Methodism, Francis Asbury, helped establish the congregation while traveling through the Carolinas.¹⁵

The early congregation worshipped in a log house that was replaced by a log sanctuary in 1808 when Thomas McEachern sold a four acre parcel to the church. In 1840 a second house of worship, a frame structure, was erected which served until the early 1920s when the present brick sanctuary was erected.¹⁶

The Arbor's exact year of construction is not known but it is referenced in the *Carolina Watchman* in 1878:

"It was our pleasure to be at this famous old camping ground a short time during its last annual meeting. These grounds are situated near the line between Cabarrus and Mecklenburg. There are some thirty-two cabins, all of which were occupied. The place has been used as a camp ground for half a century, and the new cabins going up from time to time indicates that it is likely to be a camp ground for a long time to come. It was estimated that two thousand people were present there last Sunday. We were put under obligation to Mr. Wm. Newell and J.W. Swaringer, for courtesies while there."¹⁷

The present structure's inner portion composed of an oak frame dressed with an adz was probably standing by 1878. Since the 1878 *Watchman* article indicates some 2,000 worshipers congregated there, it is possible the perimeter bay with circular-saw-dressed timbers had been erected by then. The annual summer camp meetings continued through 1915, and today take the form of a congregational summer homecoming.¹⁸

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Bethel Arbor was constructed to contain the overflow from the church sanctuary as people from far and near with their families, friends, servants, stoves and foodstuffs, cows and coops of chickens came the traditional second Sunday in August for the week-long camp meeting. At Bethel, occasionally this one week of services stretched into a second as parishioners were called by trumpet to no less than four meetings a day - at 8 and 11 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the afternoon and 8 o'clock in the evening. Services were characterized by long prayers, loud preaching, plenty of shouting and many conversions.¹⁹

By all accounts, the camp meetings were not only a period of worship but a social week as well. *"The History of Bethel United Methodist Church"* provides more detail about meetings:

"The camp meeting week was not only a period of worship, sometimes rather loud when a member felt himself filled with religious fervor, but a social week as well. Indeed, it added much to the social lives of the people. One of the favorite gathering places for the campers was the spring located across the road at the rear of the present church."²⁰

The Arbor served as a community-wide focal point as numerous families convened upon the spot for both religion and socializing. Because of the distances involved and slowness of transportation, many families built small cabins set up wagon-train style around the Arbor to stay over the week-long meetings. These cabins were small log structures. The rear was used as a sleeping area with a small space in front reserve for cooking. Enough space was left between the cabins for a team and wagon to pass through. As many as thirty-two cabins ringed the Arbor and the names of the camping families still populate the community today: Black, McEachern, Hartsell, Flowe, and Morrison to name a few.²¹ None of the cabins remain today.

The Arbor, however, continues to be a destination. Descendants of the original Blacks, McEacherns, Hartsells, Flowes, and Morrisons convene upon the Arbor annually for homecoming, still held the second week of August. The present day Arbor Services are a contemporary version of the old camp meetings. In addition to the annual meeting, the Arbor continues to be used for other events. Wedding party rehearsals, vacation bible school and "First Sunday" an evening program of worship taking place the first Sunday of each month are among present day uses of the Arbor. Bethel Arbor continues today its role in both the religious life of Bethel Methodist Church and the community life of the Midland area of Cabarrus County.

Endnotes

¹Carolina Watchman.

²Eaves, p. 20.

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Cabarrus County, N.C.

³Interview with congregation historian Katherine Eaves.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Halma, p. 75.

⁶Halma, p. 14.

⁷Kaplan, p. 224.

⁸Dodenhoff, p. 31.

⁹Lefler, p. 141-142.

¹⁰Horton, p. 8.

¹¹*Carolina Watchman*.

¹²Kooiman, pp. 7-8.

¹³Dodenhoff, p. 31.

¹⁴Phillips, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵Eaves, p. 20.

¹⁶Kaplan, p. 222.

¹⁷*Carolina Watchman*.

¹⁸Bryant.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Eaves, p. 20.

²¹Ibid.

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Cabarrus County, N.C.

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- Dodenhoff, Donna. Stanly County: *The Architectural Legacy of a Rural North Carolina County*. Charlotte: Wayne Wolfe, Herb Easton Historical Publications, 1992.
- Kaplan, Peter R. *The Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, North Carolina*. Charlotte: Craftsman Printing Company, 1981.
- Lefler, Hugh Talmadge and Albert Ray Newsome. *The History of a Southern State North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

Newspapers

- Carolina Watchman*, 5 September 1878.
- Bryant, Clara A. "Bethel M.E. Church Links Old with New." *The Charlotte Observer* 23 July 1933.

Miscellaneous Documents

- Eaves, Katherine. "The History of Bethel United Methodist Church." Progress Fall, 1980.
- Horton, Clarence E., Jr., "A Flame of fire: The Story of Early Methodism and Cabarrus County." Progress September, 1984.
- Kooiman, Barbara M. "Historic and Architectural Resources of Catawba County, North Carolina" National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, October 30, 1989.
- Phillips, Laura A "Center Arbor, Davie County" National Register Nomination, March 28, 1991.

Interviews

- Catherine Eaves, lifelong member of Bethel Methodist Church and congregation's historian, April 1996.

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Bethel Church Arbor
Cabarrus County, N.C.

Verbal boundary description

The nominated property is delineated by the dotted line in parcel 1190, Cabarrus County Tax Map 5544.01 included in this nomination.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property consists of that portion of the Bethel Methodist Church property which encompasses Bethel Arbor and its immediate surrounding of oak trees, that portion of the property which possesses both architectural and historical significance.

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Bethel Church Arbor
Cabarrus County, N.C.

The following information applies to all photographs accompanying this nomination.

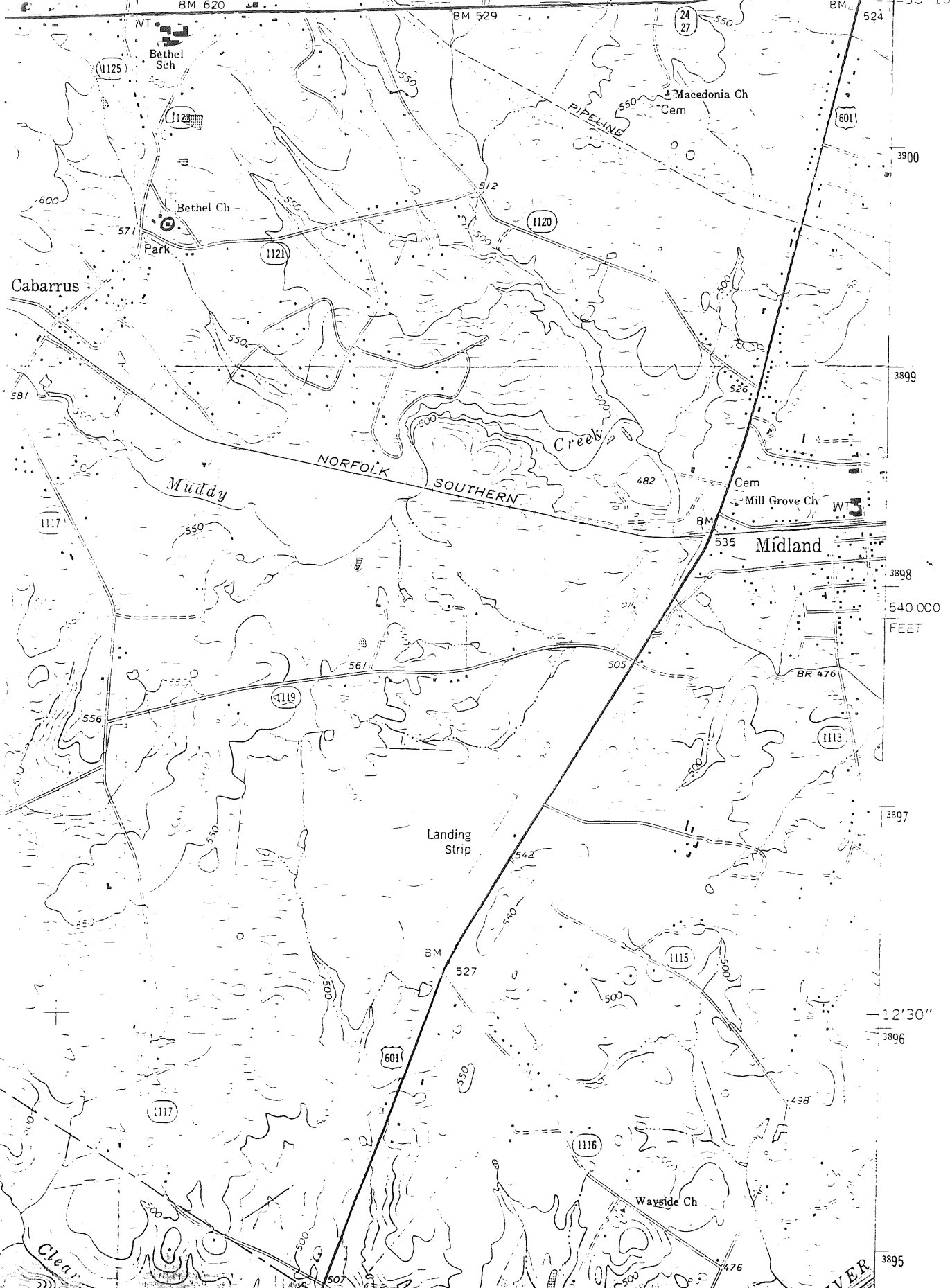
1. Bethel Church Arbor
2. Midland, North Carolina (Cabarrus County)
3. Sue G. Russell, Photographer
4. Photographed in April 1996
5. Original negatives located at the N.C. Division of Archives and History, 109 E. Jones Street, Raleigh, N.C. 27601-2807

Bethel Church Airbor
Cabarrus County, N. C.
Zone 17
N 3899650
E 542150

MIDLAND QUADRANGLE
NORTH CAROLINA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

4954 IV
(MOUNT PLEASANT)
1:62 500

32'30" 542 543 544 1 550 000 FEET CONCORD 13 MI. 80°30' 35°15'



540 000
FEET

12'30"
3896

3895

