

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 Ebenezer Presbyterian Church

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 720 Bern Street N/A not for publication

city or town New Bern N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Craven code 049 zip code 28560

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.)

Gerrit J. Crow SHPD 4/29/97
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 certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) _____

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Craven, N.C.
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	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

Historic African American Churches in
Craven County, N.C.: 1864-1997

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls brick

roof metal

other wood

Narrative Description

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

Name of Property

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion
Ethnic Heritage-Black
Architecture

Period of Significance

1924-1947

Significant Dates

1924

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Sutton, H. F., Builder

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 #

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church

Name of Property

Craven, N.C.

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 313 530 38 871 50
Zone Easting Northing

3
Zone Easting Northing
4
Zone Easting Northing

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 M. Ruth Little

organization Longleaf Historic Resources date Jan. 31, 1997

street & number 2709 Bedford Ave. telephone 919-836-8128

city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27607

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

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

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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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church**7. Physical Description**

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, a small brick Gothic Revival sanctuary, stands at the southeast corner of Bern and Cedar streets in New Bern. Erected in 1924, the well-preserved structure is surrounded by frame and brick single family dwellings built from the 1920s to the 1960s. The front-gabled building faces Bern Street, with a center double door, sheltered by a brick porch, and a bull's eye window centered in the upper gable. Four bays, separated by brick buttresses with concrete caps, create the side elevations. The small square church lot is grassed, with a parking area on the south side of the church and foundation plantings and small trees planted around the building.

Although small, its academic Gothic treatment and carefully articulated details, including door, window and brickwork treatment, give the building a strong visual presence. The steep gabled roof has flared eaves. Walls are constructed of glazed brick laid in a running bond, with a concrete water table and flush eaves at the front and rear and boxed eaves along the side elevations. The front gable bull's eye window contains radiating wooden muntins and four concrete voussoirs in the rowlock surround. Side elevation openings terminate in a shallow pointed arch surmounted by a triple rowlock header. Concrete keystones and cornerblocks accent the window headers. The front and side doors are paneled, with vertical beadboard single panel in each door. Each window opening contains a pair of replacement one-over-one wooden sash windows of small colored glass panes installed in the 1970s. The original windows (one of which is stored in the

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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basement) were wooden casements, each containing twelve panes of clear glass. Small rectangular six-pane wooden casements illuminate the raised basement. Rear elevation windows have plain double rowlock headers.

The front-gabled porch features square brick posts, diagonal sheathing in the paneled gable, flared eaves and molded eave returns. In the 1970s a bathroom was added on each side of the porch, and the porch enclosed as a vestibule, with a new double paneled door with glass transom. The bathroom additions are constructed of brick similar to that of the sanctuary, and their roofs continue the slope of the front porch, thus minimizing their intrusion to the design of the main facade.

The marble cornerstone, located at the rear north corner of the building, is inscribed:

EBENEZER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1880-1924

The chancel with its flanking rooms is housed in a slightly smaller gabled wing projecting from the rear elevation. It is finished identically to the rest of the building. Two small brick chimneys project from the roof: one at the front gable peak and one at the right rear corner.

The original interior finish and nave plan have survived as well as has the exterior finish. The sanctuary walls are finished with beadboard wainscot and plaster; the tray ceiling is sheathed with paneled beadboard. Carpeting conceals the hardwood floor. Eleven delicate brass chandeliers

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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hang from the ceiling. Two sections of original pine pews with a simple shield-shaped applique decorating the end panels flank the center aisle. Within the chancel, recessed behind a segmental arch, is the choir seating area. Centered in the rear wall of the chancel is an arched colored glass window. Two marble plaques flank the window. Small rooms, one for the minister, one for the choir, flank the chancel. These are accessed through doors with four flat panels.

The pulpit rests on a platform without a railing extending out into the sanctuary. Of mahogany, with free-standing colonnettes on the front side, the pulpit does not appear to be as old as the lay pulpit located in the right front floor area, whose painted, simple wood paneled construction resembles the interior doors of the building. This painted pulpit may have been built by the carpenters who constructed the building.

In the rear right corner of the sanctuary, an enclosed staircase leads to the basement. The open-string stair railing has a turned newel, molded handrail and turned balusters. The basement contains a fellowship hall, with kitchen and storage room partitioned off at the rear. The area is finished with modern materials: linoleum flooring, plywood paneled walls and ceiling, but one original support post--a slender cast-iron Corinthian column--remains visible. In the main area, a built-in pine cupboard with glass-fronted doors, which now holds books, appears to be original.

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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8. Statement of Significance

The small Gothic Revival brick building of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, rebuilt in 1924 after the Great Fire of 1922, stands at 720 Bern Street in New Bern. During the Civil War when many of New Bern's blacks affiliated with one of the black Methodist denominations who evangelized in the South, the black members of First Presbyterian Church, a white church, remained faithful to the predominantly white church. In 1878 a separate colored congregation, which became Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, was established. The small conservative congregation of educated and influential black citizens is not only one of the five oldest African American churches in New Bern, it also is distinguished as one of the oldest black Presbyterian congregations in eastern North Carolina. As the architecturally significant sanctuary of a historic black congregation, Ebenezer Presbyterian Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C (architecture) and A (religion and ethnic heritage-black), as discussed in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic African American Churches in Craven County: 1864-1947."

Historical Background

In 1886 when the Rev. L. C. Vass, long-time minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New Bern (established 1817), wrote the history of his church, he felt a sufficient bond with the "colored Presbyterian church" that he included its history as well. After all, Vass was instrumental in its establishment, and there was apparently still a close relationship between the

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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two churches. When Vass arrived in New Bern in 1866, shortly after the Civil War ended, he found a church in disarray, with most of its members gone. In 1854 the church had seventy-five members, of whom twelve were colored. Vass had records of separate services being held for blacks at the Presbyterian Church since at least 1832, and he noted that a Mrs. Stanly, an emancipated slave who was apparently still alive in 1886, was one of the original members of the church. In the 1860s and continuing after emancipation, the colored members attended the regular services.

About 1878, as stated by Vass, "It was deemed best to attempt the organization of a distinct Colored Presbyterian Church." In May 1878 B.B. Palmer, a colored minister licensed by Orange Presbytery, the association to which the First Presbyterian Church belonged, began to organize a separate church for the African American members. By November of that year eleven members had been gathered: John Randolph, Sr., John Randolph, Jr., Caroline Barham, Livinia Willard, George H. White, Julius Willis, Caesar Lewis, William O. Randolph, Jane Coats, L. Palmer and W. W. Lawrence. White, Julius Willis, and John Randolph Sr. were elected ruling elders. Rev. Vass and a church committee officially established the new church, known as the Ebenezer Colored Presbyterian Church. Members met in the Congregational Schoolhouse which stood at the corner of Johnson and Middle Streets. Minister Palmer left in February, 1879 and the Rev. Allen A. Scott, born in South Carolina and a minister of the Yadkin Presbytery, became the minister.¹

¹ Rev. L. C. Vass, *History of the Presbyterian Church of New Bern, N.C.* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1886), 164, 183-184.

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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The best known member of the congregation was George H. White, who was born a slave in New Bern in 1852, educated as a lawyer in Washington, D.C. and returned to New Bern in 1877, where he taught, practiced law, and was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1897. White owned a house on Johnson Street among New Bern's leading white society. He was the last black Congressman from the South until the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, and at the end of his term in 1901, despairing of the struggle for black rights, left North Carolina to live in Philadelphia.² Other charter church members had occupations more typical of New Bern's black population: William O. Randolph was a waiter at the Central Hotel; W. W. Lawrence, a cooper; and Julius Willis, a drayman.³

Through the cooperative fund-raising of the white and the African American Presbyterian congregations and other individuals, a lot was purchased on Pasteur Street facing the New Bern Railroad Station and a sanctuary erected by 1880. Rev. Vass preached the dedication sermon. An engraving of the building in Vass's history showed a highly decorative Carpenter Gothic frame building with a distinctive gable-roofed bell tower, board and batten siding, intricate sawnwork string courses, and diamond-paned windows which were fixed in the center and pivoted open.⁴ Charter member and trustee William O. Randolph is said to have been the architect and builder of this building.⁵

² Thomas Hanchett and Ruth Little, "The History and Architecture of Long Wharf and Greater Duffyfield" (City of New Bern Historic Preservation Commission, 1994), 16-17.

³ 1880-81 *Emerson & Co.'s Newbern, N.C. City Directory*.

⁴ 1880-81 *Emerson & Co.'s Newbern, N.C. City Directory*.

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Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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The church withdrew from Orange Presbytery and joined Yadkin Presbytery in 1881. By 1886 it had attracted seventy-four members. Rev. Scott died in 1889, and is commemorated in the present church chancel by a plaque donated by his widow in 1925. The plaque notes that he was the founder and builder of the Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh. This church originated as a mission school established by the Northern Presbyterian Church to teach emancipated slave children.⁶

According to the church's own written history, it benefitted greatly from the assistance of the Northern (white) Presbyterian Church. The first bell in its bell tower was a silver one made in England for a church in Philadelphia, and later given by that church to Ebenezer Church. During a storm, the tower and bell were blown down and the bell broke.⁷ Various members willed their property to the church, and due to their generosity, during the ministry of Rev. H. C. Miller from 1909 to 1921, a pipe organ was purchased and installed.⁸

The Great Fire of 1922, which originated in Rowland Lumber Mill on the Neuse River near Pasteur Street on December 1, destroyed the church sanctuary and a manse which had been constructed at an unknown date. Ebenezer Church lost everything, including its records and all of

⁵ Church program, "Ebenezer Presbyterian Church's Post Centennial Celebration 1878-1988," copy in file.

⁶ Linda Simmons-Henry & Linda Harris Edmisten, *Culture town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities* (Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, Inc., 1993) 74.

⁷ "History of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church," Centennial Celebration 1878-1888 program (copy in file).

⁸ History of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church," Centennial Celebration 1878-1888 program.

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its furnishings. The First Presbyterian Church allowed Ebenezer members to worship in its educational building, and donated Sunday School literature and hymnbooks.

The congregation of Ebenezer Church quickly regrouped and in February 1923, just two months later, paid \$2,500 for a lot at the corner of Bern and Cedar streets three blocks to the west of their destroyed church site. The trustees were Samuel Blackledge, R. W. Williamson, George P. Dudley, James C. Bryant, L. Reynolds, J. W. Mills, Yorke Hill and H. F. Sutton.⁹ In order to raise the \$10,000 necessary to construct the new church, church members borrowed money from local banks and from various agencies of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.¹⁰ The new church sanctuary rose from 1923 to 1924 under the service of Rev. O. E. Sanders.¹¹

According to tradition, church trustee H. F. Sutton, a builder and undertaker, was the designer and builder of the new sanctuary. Members of the congregation donated money and labor to assist in the effort. One of the older members who was a boy at the time, Allen Dudley Sr., recalled that he, James Carl Pearson, Maceo Bragg, Sr., and other boys dug out the basement of the new building by hand. The carpenters who built the church donated one day of their labor each week.¹² The cornerstone was laid in 1924.

⁹ Craven County Deed Book 252, 108.

¹⁰ See various mortgage deeds: Craven County Deed Book 251, 498; 261, 43; 261, 272.

¹¹ The Board of National Missions and the Board of the Church Erection Fund of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. granted mortgages to Ebenezer Church from 1923 to 1927. See Craven County Deed Book 251, 498; 261, 43; 261, 272.

¹² "History of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church," Centennial program.

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The church has been blessed by ministers who remained for many years. The longest tenure of any pastor of Ebenezer Church was that of Rev. C. H. C. White, who served from 1939 to 1975. His major accomplishment was the organization of the Junior Church, a program for church youth, in 1939. A marble plaque commorating Rev. White hangs in the chancel. In recent years the church has grown smaller, with current membership at approximately thirty-five, but continues to be active in the community. During the 1980s New Bern's Soup Kitchen operated out of the basement of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church. Ebenezer Church is the only black Presbyterian church remaining in northeastern North Carolina.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Major Bibliographical References

Craven County Deeds.

“Ebenezer Presbyterian Church’s Post Centennial Celebration 1878-1988”, church program.
Copy on file at N.C. State Historic Preservation Office.

Emerson & Co.’s 1880-81 New Bern, N.C. City Directory.

Hanchett, Thomas W. and Little, M. Ruth. *The History and Architecture of Long Wharf and Greater Duffyfield*. New Bern Historic Preservation Commission, 1994.

“History of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church,” Centennial Celebration 1878-1888 program. Copy on file at N.C. State Historic Preservation Office.

Simmons-Henry, Linda and Edmisten, Linda Harris. *Culture town: Life in Raleigh’s African American Communities*. Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, Inc., 1993.

Vass, Rev. L. C. *History of the Presbyterian Church of New Bern, N.C.*. Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1886.

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10. Verbal Boundary Description

The parcel, a rectangle 96 feet by 107 feet, is shown in the accompanying Craven County tax map: Parcel 8-7-334.

Boundary Justification

This parcel constitutes the entire property historically associated with Ebenezer Presbyterian Church sanctuary.

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Photographs:

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Photographer: M. Ruth Little

Date: November 1996

Location of negatives: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh

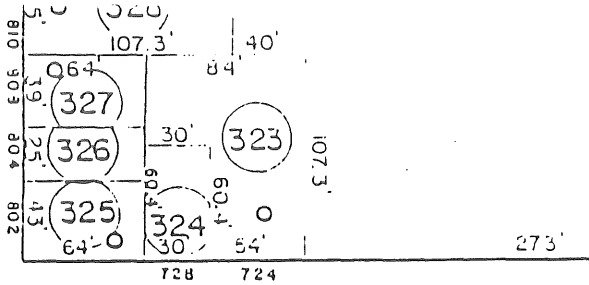
- A. Overall view from southwest

- B. Main facade view from west

- C. View of sanctuary from west

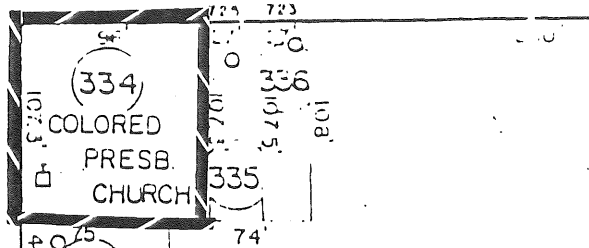
- D. View of sanctuary from northeast

- E. View of basement from east

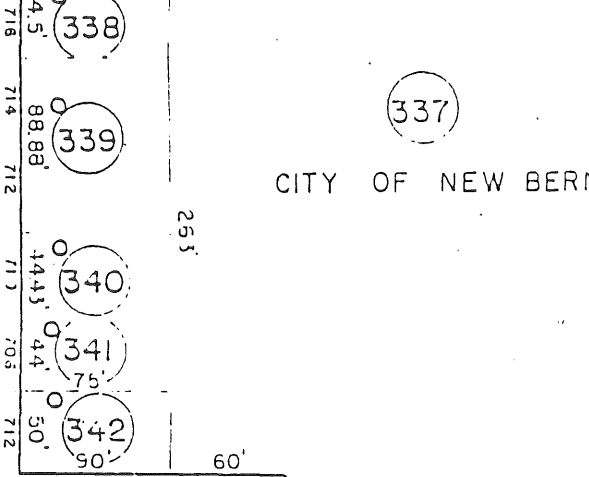


Ebenezer Presbyterian Church
 Craven County Tax Map: Parcel
 8-7-334
 Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet

STREET



CITY OF NEW BERN



CITY OF NEW BERN
 NATIONAL GUARD.

POLICE DEPT

1956 278'

STREET

GEORGE STREET



SEC. MAP 3-3

STREET

S. NEW

STREET

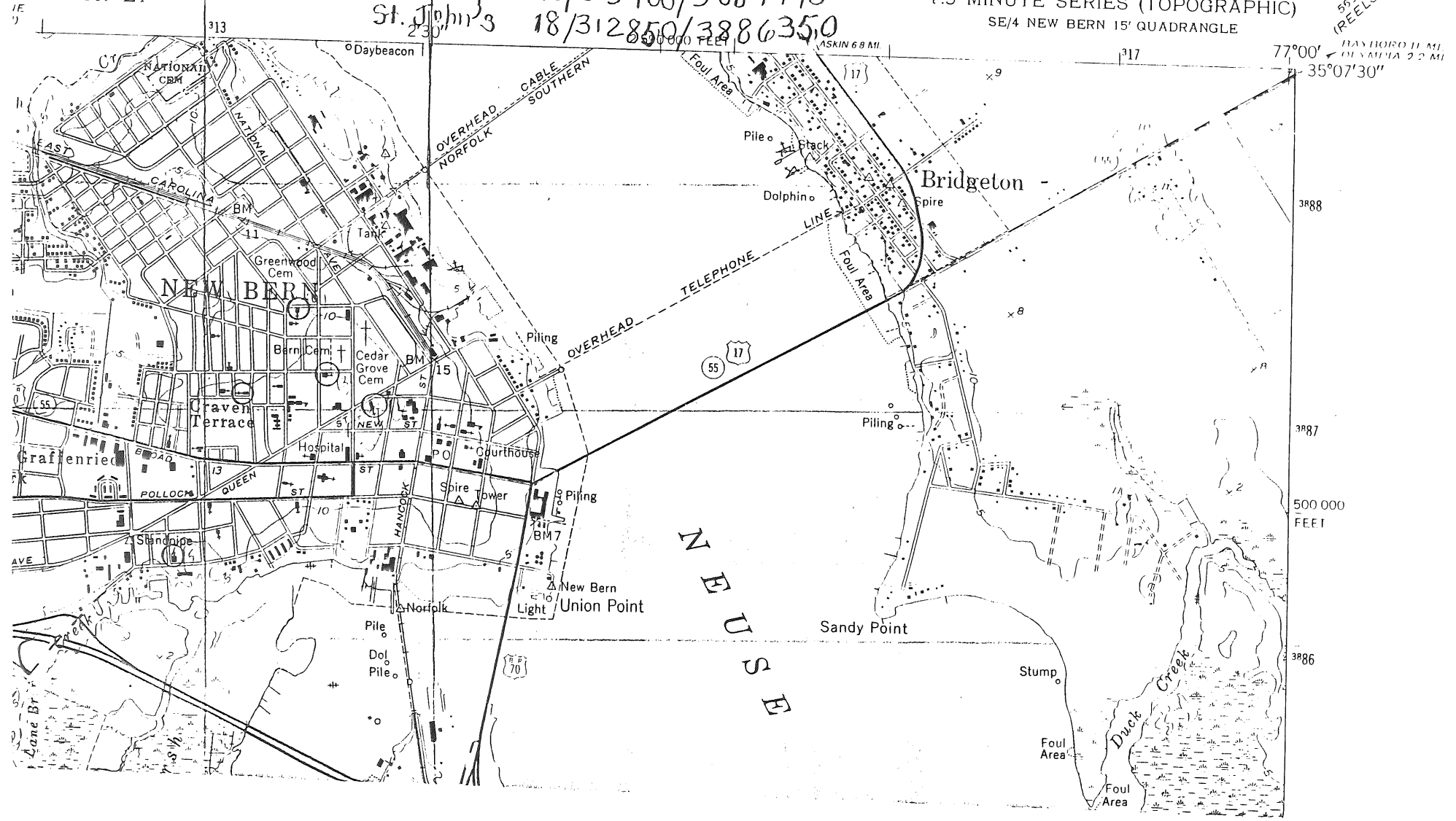
5570.18

St. Peter's 18/313740/3887000
 Rue Chapel 18/313180/3887070
 Ebenezer 18/313530/3887150
 First Baptist 18/313400/3887440
 St. John's 18/312850/3886350

Craven Co.
 NEW BERN QUADRANGLE
 NORTH CAROLINA
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
 SE/4 NEW BERN 15' QUADRANGLE

559111 NW
 (REELSBORO)
 HAYBORE 11 MI
 OF YAMHUA 2.2 MI

TATES
 COMMERCE
 ETIC SURVEY



NEW BERN

