

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle

Denton vicinity, Davidson County, DV0466, Listed 4/24/2012

Nomination by Laura A. W. Phillips

Photographs by Laura A. W. Phillips, March 2011



Overall view



View toward north end platform

**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 any 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 Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle

other names/site number Chapel Hill Methodist Arbor

2. Location

street & number 1457 Chapel Hill Church Road not for publication N/A

city or town Denton vicinity X

state North Carolina code NC county Davidson code 057 zip code 27239

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

State or 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 or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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

Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle
Name of Property

Davidson County, NC
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	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	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)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof METAL

walls WOOD

ASPHALT

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.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a 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)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1870, mid-1920s

Significant Dates

1870, mid-1920s

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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: _____

Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle
Name of Property

Davidson County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing
1 17 584180 3934620
2 _____

Zone Easting Northing
3 _____
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 Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date December 20, 2011

street & number 637 North Spring Street telephone 336-727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

12. 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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Trustees of Chapel Hill United Methodist Church (Chris Smith, Pastor)

street & number P. O. Box 1967 telephone 336-859-2755

city or town Denton state NC zip code 27239

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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle
Davidson County, North Carolina

DESCRIPTION

Summary and Setting

The Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle is a one-story, heavy-timber, open-framework building, open on three sides, with a concrete floor and a gable-on-hip roof. It was originally used for the religious services at the annual camp meetings held at Chapel Hill Church and is still used for that purpose at the revivals held every September. The tabernacle was initially constructed in 1870 and was enlarged in the mid-1920s, continuing the traditional form of this building type.

Located in the rural southeastern corner of Davidson County in Piedmont North Carolina, the Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle is approximately seven miles south of the small town of Denton and carries a Denton mailing address. It is prominently sited on a slight rise of land on the east side of a sharp curve in Chapel Hill Church Road. The tabernacle sits approximately seventy-five feet from the road on a grassy lawn surrounded by tall oak trees. West of the tabernacle and close to the road is a timber-framed wood sign set on a concrete base that gives the name of the church and pastor and the address. The nominated property consists of less than one acre and is set within an asphalt driveway on the north, a sidewalk in front of the church on the east, an asphalt parking lot on the south, and Chapel Hill Church Road on the west. It is part of the overall church property of just over three acres. The church cemetery stands to the north of the tabernacle. The church, built in 1933 and enlarged and remodeled ca. 1970, stands behind the tabernacle to the east. The church and cemetery are not included in the nomination because they lack architectural or other historic significance that would render them eligible under the criteria considerations.

Tabernacle

Typical of its building type, the Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle is and always has been an open-air structure. The original, 1870, tabernacle stands at the center of the present building and is sheltered by a gable roof with a north-south ridge. The tabernacle is oriented to the north. The 1870 building measures approximately thirty feet wide and forty-nine feet long. Originally it had a packed dirt floor and its gable roof was covered with wood shingles. The hand-hewn, heavy-timber, mortise-and-tenoned and pegged framework remains exposed and intact. The support posts are approximately seven-and-a-half inches square and seven-and-a-half-feet tall. The upper portions of the posts are hewn, but the lower portions (approximately four feet) remain round, though skinned of their bark.

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The original tabernacle has five north-south bays and two east-west bays, with the exception that the north end is divided into three bays. The north-south posts are not evenly spaced, but there is a pattern. The center bay is the widest, at just over fifteen feet. The two bays immediately flanking the center bay are just over eight feet wide, and the two bays at the north and south ends are approximately eight-and-a-half feet wide. Why the center bay is so much larger than the others is not known. By contrast, the three east-west posts are evenly spaced.

Angle braces at the tops of the posts support the massive plates. The north-south plates consist of two timbers joined at the center by a scarf joint and two vertical pegs, and the east-west plates are single, thirty-foot-long timbers. The plates on the two long sides are notched at the top and originally held notched rafters, which were pegged in place to prevent slippage. Secondary posts, supported by single angle braces, rise from the joists about six feet in from the outer plates to support higher-level plates.

In the mid-1920s, the tabernacle was enlarged by adding a ring of posts about six feet out from the original tabernacle. These posts are approximately six inches square and six feet tall. They support plates that are joined at the center by a half-lapped joint. The 1920s timbers are circular sawn and are nailed together. Expanding the tabernacle on all four sides meant that the roof had to be rebuilt to cover the whole. To do this, vertical struts were added to the tops of the primary, original, north-south plates to support new circular-sawn rafters. The resulting gable was broader than that of the original roof and extended to shelter the expanded east and west sides of the building. So that the new roof was not one massive gable, the north and south ends were hipped to cover the north and south extensions of the tabernacle. Long boards were nailed horizontally to the tops of the rafters to hold the roof sheathing.

With the 1920s tabernacle expansion, the east and west sides and south end were left open, but the north end was enclosed with horizontal flush boarding, to which sheets of brick-patterned asphalt were added in later years. (It is not known whether the north end of the original tabernacle was open or closed.) Long panels that hinge downward to provide ventilation were cut into the north wall. At the same time, the slatted, horizontal-board gable ends of the rebuilt roof were fitted with hinged panels that lift upward to allow for even more air circulation.

A low, wood, interior platform was built at the north end of the tabernacle to elevate both the preacher and the choir. Pews for the choir are located behind a low, vertical-board wall that continues around the east and west sides of the choir loft, terminating at the north end wall. A semi-circular section of the platform projects southward from the low wall of the choir loft to allow the preacher to be closer to the congregation. A low, angular, solid balustrade is positioned along the center front edge of the semi-circular platform. Behind the choir loft, the

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north end wall of the tabernacle makes it easier for the audience to see the preacher and choir, because they are not backlit.

Several alterations were made to the tabernacle during the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1950s, the packed-dirt floor was replaced with poured concrete, which helped cut down on dust and mud. This typical alteration is found at several other tabernacles, or arbors, in the Piedmont. A concrete-block foundation was added beneath the poured concrete on the south and west sides to level the floor where the land slopes downward. A concrete-block step is located near the west end of the south side of the tabernacle, and two sets of brick steps are on the west side near the north end. Concrete-block piers were placed at the north end beneath the wood floor of the choir loft. In 1962, the wood-shingled roof was replaced with standing-seam metal. Probably also in the 1960s, roll-up canvas shades were hung from the eaves on the east, south, and west sides. A wood chest measuring two by two by fourteen feet for storing the shades when they were not in use was set on the roof joists on the east side of the tabernacle. It is no longer used. Boards were also laid across two of the roof joists at the south (rear) end of the tabernacle to make a small storage platform. A form-free concrete sidewalk (date unknown) extends southward from the building. Formed concrete sidewalks on the west side and the north end of the east side were added ca. 2000. On the east side, the sidewalk doubles as a low handicap ramp. These alterations do not detract from the overall architectural integrity of the tabernacle.

Inside the tabernacle are simple, moveable pews with wood-slatted seats and backs. They date from the last quarter of the twentieth century. There are also several plain wood pews on either side of the tabernacle that have solid seats, backs, and ends. They may have come from another location, but from where and from when they date is not known.

Integrity Assessment

The well-preserved Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle retains a very good degree of integrity in terms of its location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The open structural systems of both the original, 1870, tabernacle and the mid-1920s expansion possess very few replacement members. The expansion of the tabernacle in the 1920s – which reflected the continued success of the camp meetings and revivals held at Chapel Hill Church – was not merely an alteration of the original building, but was a design with its own merit. With its heavy, but circular-sawn, exposed timbers and open sides, it consciously continued into the second decade of the twentieth century the design traditions of the nineteenth-century tabernacles, or arbors, built in Piedmont North Carolina. Post-1950 alterations, as previously described, are relatively minor and do not diminish the overall architectural integrity

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of the tabernacle. Today, Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle survives as one of the oldest and best-preserved of the lessening number of religious arbors in the state, and it is the only one remaining in Davidson County.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Located in the southeast corner of Davidson County in North Carolina's Piedmont, Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle stands on the grounds of Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, whose congregation dates from 1854. The locally significant Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle meets Criterion C for listing in the National Register because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century building type known as an arbor (called a tabernacle at Chapel Hill) – the one-story, heavy-timbered, open-sided building used for services at religious camp meetings and later at revivals. The Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle meets Criterion Consideration A because, although it is owned by a religious institution and used for religious purposes, its significance is architectural. There are two periods of significance: 1870, the original date of construction, and the mid-1920s, when the tabernacle was expanded on all four sides, consciously continuing the nineteenth-century arbor design traditions and reflecting the continued popularity of the camp meetings held at Chapel Hill Church.

Religious camp meetings gained popularity in North Carolina during the nineteenth century and were seen as a powerful means of evangelism. They not only marked a time of spiritual enrichment and growth, but also a time when family and friends, especially in the backcountry, could gather for much anticipated fellowship. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, camp meeting arbors were scattered throughout North Carolina. Today, the number of surviving arbors has greatly diminished, and most are located in the western Piedmont. Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle is the sole surviving arbor in Davidson County. Among the oldest of those still standing in the state, the well preserved arbor remains an excellent example of its vernacular building type.

Historical Background

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several branches of the Methodist denomination developed in America. The primary branch was the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was established in 1784. Soon, the new church was well on its way to becoming the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The majority of followers lived in the South, especially in North Carolina and Virginia. In 1844, the denomination split over the issue of slavery, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was created. Meanwhile, in 1830, another group of Methodists had left the main denomination, this time over the desire for equality among clergy and laity as well as the election of clergy leadership. A product of the

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American democratic spirit, the Methodist Protestant movement represented, in part, a rebellion against the church's hierarchical system by the common people who wanted to be able to shape their own faith and submit to leaders of their own choosing. Chapel Hill Church was founded as part of the Methodist Protestant branch of Methodism. In 1939, the Methodist Protestants, along with the two Methodist Episcopal branches, merged to create the Methodist Church. In 1968, the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren – a group with Germanic heritage that had separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1815 – to become the United Methodist Church, the present name of the denomination (McGuire, 13-15, 18-19).

According to the church history, Chapel Hill Methodist Protestant Church was organized in 1854. Supporting this date, Chapel Hill was mentioned for the first time in the minutes of the second quarterly conference of the Davidson Circuit, which was held on April 21, 1855. Church tradition claims that the first church was log, but that it was replaced several years later by a frame structure. The present brick church dates from 1933 and was enlarged and remodeled ca. 1970 (Smith, 1; Davidson Circuit Minutes, 67; Phillips, Loflin Interviews).

In the late eighteenth century, when Methodist circuit riders first traveled to settlements in North Carolina and to the state's vast backcountry, they initially held services in homes, barns, or other available buildings. These spaces quickly proved inadequate, as those who came for the preaching or simply out of curiosity multiplied. To accommodate the growing numbers, services moved outdoors (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xii).

Camp meetings had their start in North Carolina in 1794 at Rehoboth in Lincoln County and were held in the state throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. A few are still held. The favored outdoor location was a wooded site with an available water source and nearby pasturage. Underbrush was cleared to create a grove where worshippers could stand or sit, and an elevated wood platform was constructed to provide a temporary stage for the preacher. Services consisted primarily of preaching, praying, and singing. As the crowds grew, and as people came from greater distances – particularly in the sparsely settled backcountry – services extended for several days. Attendees slept in their wagons or in tents made of cloth or brush. Born of necessity and encouraged by the fervor of the Great Revival of religion in America during the early decades of the nineteenth century, these services evolved into the annual camp meeting. Other denominations – most notably the Baptists and the Presbyterians – also held camp meetings prior to the Civil War. But it was the Methodists who capitalized on this form of worship, developing it into a powerful and lasting means of evangelism. Up through the first quarter of the twentieth century, Methodist periodicals regularly published calendars and advertisements for upcoming camp meetings (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xii).

Until the Civil War, slaves were allowed to attend some camp meetings in North Carolina, such as Rock Springs (NR 1972) in Lincoln County and Balls Creek (NR 1990) in

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Catawba County. However, after the Civil War, emancipated slaves usually were no longer welcome to worship in white campgrounds, so they began to establish their own. Among these were Tucker's Grove (NR 1972) in Lincoln County and Mott's Grove and McKenzie's Grove in Catawba County, all of which date from the 1870s (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xii-xiii).

Churches often were established as a product of camp meetings. Conversely, some already-established churches built arbors and associated campgrounds, understanding that camp meetings were an important method of drawing people to God (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xii). The latter was the case with the arbor, or tabernacle as they called it, at Chapel Hill Church.

The typical Methodist camp meeting ground consisted of two primary – communal and private – parts: the “arbor” and the so-called “tents.” Over time, actual tents were replaced with rustic log or frame cabins where many of the worshippers stayed at night. This hierarchal arrangement placed the arbor, the site of worship services, at the heart of the complex. In the larger campgrounds that were not on the grounds of a church, the tents were often arranged contiguously in concentric rows that surrounded the central campground square, or plaza, with its arbor. Individual families used their tents, or cabins, year after year and passed them down from generation to generation (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xiii).

Camp meetings and outdoor revivals remained popular throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, particularly in the Piedmont. Some, including Chapel Hill, are still active, and where cabins remain, attendees continue to stay on the site. As they did historically, these revivals continue to convene for a week or longer during August or September, when crops had been planted but harvesting had not yet begun or was completed. As in the early years, when camp meetings provided a welcome opportunity for often-isolated farm families to worship and socialize, they continue to be greatly anticipated times of worship and fellowship for many people (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, xiii).

When the tabernacle at Chapel Hill Church was built in 1870, A. J. Laughlin was serving as Elder Minister. In his 1927 *Centennial History of Davidson County*, Jacob Calvin Leonard credited Laughlin with building up the camp meeting tradition in Davidson County (McGuire, 97; Leonard, 423). As originally built, the tabernacle at Chapel Hill Church measured approximately thirty feet by forty-nine feet. A documentary photograph in the church history shows that it had a steep gable roof (Smith, photo between pages 10 and 11).

At Chapel Hill, the tabernacle was built on a wooded lawn in front of the church. Apparently, and probably for spatial reasons, the cabins did not follow a contiguous arrangement surrounding the central worship site. Instead, church tradition and an early-twentieth-century photograph suggest that they were arranged in a somewhat more random fashion west of the tabernacle, north of the tabernacle by the cemetery and, especially, behind (east of) the church. The last of the cabins was removed in 1947 (Phillips, Waisner Interview; Phillips, Surratt

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Interview; Smith, 8, photo between pages 10 and 11). Chapel Hill's arrangement was rather like that at Center Arbor (NR 1991) in Davie County, which was built in 1876, well after the establishment of Center Church (Phillips, *Legacy of Faith*, 94). Center Arbor's cabins, which were probably also arranged in a more random manner, no longer survive.

In 1871, the delegates to the third quarterly conference of the Davidson Circuit decided that the scheduling of camp meetings would be left to the discretion of the local pastors (Davidson Circuit Minutes, 190). However, at the quarterly conference held in July 1880, the delegates, themselves, drew up a schedule for the year's camp meetings that ran from the fourth Sunday in August to the fourth Sunday in September. Chapel Hill's assigned time began the third Sunday of September. This may have been when the church was already holding its camp meetings, but Chapel Hill has adhered to this schedule ever since. The schedule developed in 1880 indicated that camp meetings were also being held at Pleasant Grove, Piney Grove, Jerusalem, and Mount Ebal churches within the Davidson Circuit (McGuire, 78).

According to oral tradition, the Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle suffered a fire in 1905. Apparently located in the roof, the fire was soon extinguished and the tabernacle was saved (Smith, 47). Small areas of charring on the upper beams remain as a reminder of the near disaster.

During the pastorate of Charles E. Ridge, who served the Davidson Circuit between 1924 and 1928, the tabernacle at Chapel Hill Church was said to have been "rebuilt" (McGuire, 111). This is doubtless when the tabernacle was enlarged, a project that added a bay's width to all four sides, necessitating a redesigned roof. The expanded tabernacle measured approximately fifty feet by seventy feet and included the choir loft at the north end. The mid-1920s enlargement of the tabernacle was a testament to the popularity of Chapel Hill's camp meetings. In fact, J. C. Leonard stated in his 1927 county history that "Chapel Hill is known far and near on account of the great crowds that gather there for the annual camp meetings" (Leonard, 423). The camp meetings and, later, revivals without the camping, began on the third Sunday of September and lasted for a week or longer at Chapel Hill (Smith, 1, 13). An important part of the life of the church, they marked a time of spiritual enrichment and growth and also served as a time of fellowship with family and friends – often from afar – who came together for the event.

Knowledge of the activities at Chapel Hill's camp meetings comes from oral history passed down from generation to generation. The revivals lasted a week, ten days, or even longer, and services were held in the morning, afternoon, and evening under the tabernacle. There was much singing by both the choir and the congregation. Prayer meetings were in progress throughout the day. The men went as a group to the west wood to pray, while the women met to pray on the east side of the church (Smith, 1-3).

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Up through the early twentieth century, the tabernacle was lit by oil lamps anchored to the support posts. Additional lighting was provided by fires built on piles of large rocks located on either side of the tabernacle. Around 1920, carbide lighting was installed, which was a great improvement over the oil lamps and rock fires. Later, electricity powered the lights (Smith, 75).

For many years, visiting preachers slept on beds placed in the church during the camp meetings, and campers prepared their meals. Many families moved to the campground and camped in their wagons, tents, or camp cabins for the duration of the camp meetings. This tradition began to slowly change after 1912, the year in which the first automobile appeared at the camp meeting (Smith, 1, 8, 48).

As part of the process of maintaining the tabernacle for continued use, several modifications were made during the second half of the twentieth century. Two of these were common changes seen at some other camp meeting arbors. In the mid-1950s, the original straw-covered, packed-dirt floor was replaced with poured concrete. This helped to limit the dust during dry periods and the mud during rainy times. In 1962, the wood shingles covering the roof were replaced with metal sheathing (Phillips, Surratt Interview). Canvas roll-up shades were attached to the eaves of the three open sides of the tabernacle. The date of their installation is not certain. However, around the 1960s, a wood chest for storing the shades was placed on the roof joists on the east side of the tabernacle. The chest measures approximately two feet by two feet by fourteen feet, and has a hinged top and openings at either end for ventilation. Apparently, the storage chest has not been used for some years. Instead, the shades remain attached to the eaves and rolled up when not in use. Perhaps also in the 1960s, boards were laid across two of the roof joists at the south (rear) end of the tabernacle, creating a small storage platform (Phillips, Talbert Interview).

In 1970, Chapel Hill Church celebrated the centennial of the construction of its tabernacle. Today, nearly a century and a half after it was built, the tabernacle remains in good condition. Although, technically, camp meetings are no longer held at Chapel Hill, since there is no longer camping on the grounds, the tabernacle continues to be a vital part of the church property, because it is here that spiritual revivals are held every year at the same time they have always been held. Today the tabernacle is also used for Memorial Sunday in May (Phillips, Loflin Interviews).

Architecture Context

As a vernacular building type, an arbor – called a tabernacle at Chapel Hill Church – is a large, open-air shelter for religious revivals. Arbors were conceived to fulfill a primary need of religious camp meetings: a structure that was relatively easy and inexpensive to build and

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maintain and that would provide protection from the elements for a large number of people while, at the same time, allowing for maximum ventilation during the hot, late summer days when they were in use.

The earliest arbors from the nineteenth century usually replaced more temporary brush arbors or simple, elevated preaching platforms. Surviving arbors in North Carolina, which date from 1832 to the third quarter of the twentieth century, reveal that for more than a century, the general features of this building type remained the same, while small variations appeared in individual examples.

Open on at least three sides, an arbor is a large structure with a hewn-timber or wood-pole open framework supporting a massive hip, gable, or gable-on-hip roof. A raised platform at one end signifies the space for one or more preachers and often a choir. Facing the preaching platform are rows of simple pews or benches separated by one or more aisles. Originally, the floor of an arbor consisted of packed dirt covered during camp meeting times with straw. In the twentieth century (in the 1950s at Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle), some of the dirt floors were covered with poured concrete, which cut down on dust and mud. Many arbors have one end that is enclosed or, as an alternative, one roof slope that extends down farther than the others. This feature is often on the west end of the arbor, but it is always on the end behind the preaching platform to make it easier for camp meeting participants to see the preacher without glare from the sun. Where one end of the arbor is enclosed, there is some form of wall ventilation for better air circulation.

The Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle exemplifies the arbors built in North Carolina during the nineteenth century, and its 1920s expansion continued the earlier traditions of arbor construction. Originally (in 1870) measuring approximately thirty by forty-nine feet, it was enlarged in the mid-1920s to approximately fifty by seventy feet. The heavy, hewn timbers of the 1870 tabernacle are mortise-and-tenoned and pegged. However, only the upper section of each seven-to-eight-inch-square support post is hewn; the lower four feet (approximately) are left round, but skinned of their bark. Like the original posts, the support posts associated with the mid-1920s tabernacle expansion are large, measuring approximately six inches square, but unlike the original hewn timbers, they are circular sawn.

A steep gable roof originally covered the tabernacle, but when the building was expanded on all four sides, the roof had to be rebuilt to shelter the whole. Vertical struts were added to the tops of the primary, original, north-south plates to support new circular-sawn rafters, creating a gable that was broader than that of the original roof. It extended to cover the expanded east and west sides of the building. So that the new roof was not one massive gable, the north and south ends were hipped to cover the north and south extensions of the tabernacle. Long boards were nailed horizontally to the tops of the rafters to hold the roof sheathing. Typical of nineteenth-

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Davidson County, North Carolina

century arbors, the roof originally was sheathed with wood shingles and, like other arbors, the shingles were replaced later with sheet metal. At Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle, this change occurred in 1962.

When the tabernacle was enlarged in the 1920s, the north end was enclosed with horizontal flush boarding, which was later covered on the exterior with the present brick-patterned asphalt sheeting. Panels that hinge downward to provide ventilation were cut into the north wall. At the same time, the slatted, horizontal-board gable ends were fitted with hinged panels that lift upward to allow for even more air circulation.

Where the preacher originally stood is not known, but when the tabernacle was enlarged, a low wood platform was built at the north end to elevate both the preacher and the choir. Pews for the choir are located behind a low, vertical-board wall, while a semi-circular section of the platform extends outward toward the audience, allowing the preacher to move about in a space close to the people.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, camp meeting arbors were scattered throughout North Carolina. However, as the twentieth century progressed, many camp meetings ceased to be held and their arbors slowly disappeared from the landscape. A few camp meetings, such as Rock Springs and Tucker's Grove in Lincoln County and Balls Creek in Catawba County, continue to be held annually, and at those places not only the arbors but also the surrounding "tents" remain standing and in use. These places are extremely rare. At other places, the tents disappeared as camping during the annual revivals ceased, but the arbors were retained for continued use with the revivals. Such is the case at Center Church in Davie County, Morrows Chapel in Iredell County, and Chapel Hill Church in Davidson County. Most of the surviving arbors in North Carolina are located in the western Piedmont, especially in Lincoln and Catawba counties. In Davidson County, although nineteenth-century camp meetings are known to have been held at five sites, at least, the only arbor to survive is the 1870 Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle. Among the oldest surviving arbors in the state, it is still used for the church's annual revivals and remains an excellent example of this vernacular building type.

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Davidson County, North Carolina

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by a solid black line on the accompanying Property Map/Tax Map, drawn to a scale of 1" = 100'. It consists of a less-than-one-acre portion of Davidson County Tax Parcel 6685-01-18-6109, delineated by a dashed line on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property was drawn eastward from Chapel Hill Church Road to include the Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle and its immediate setting of lawn and oak trees, which is its original site. The boundary excludes the 1933 church east of the tabernacle, which was enlarged and remodeled ca. 1970, and the church cemetery north of the tabernacle, because neither possesses architectural or other historic significance that would render them eligible under the criteria considerations.

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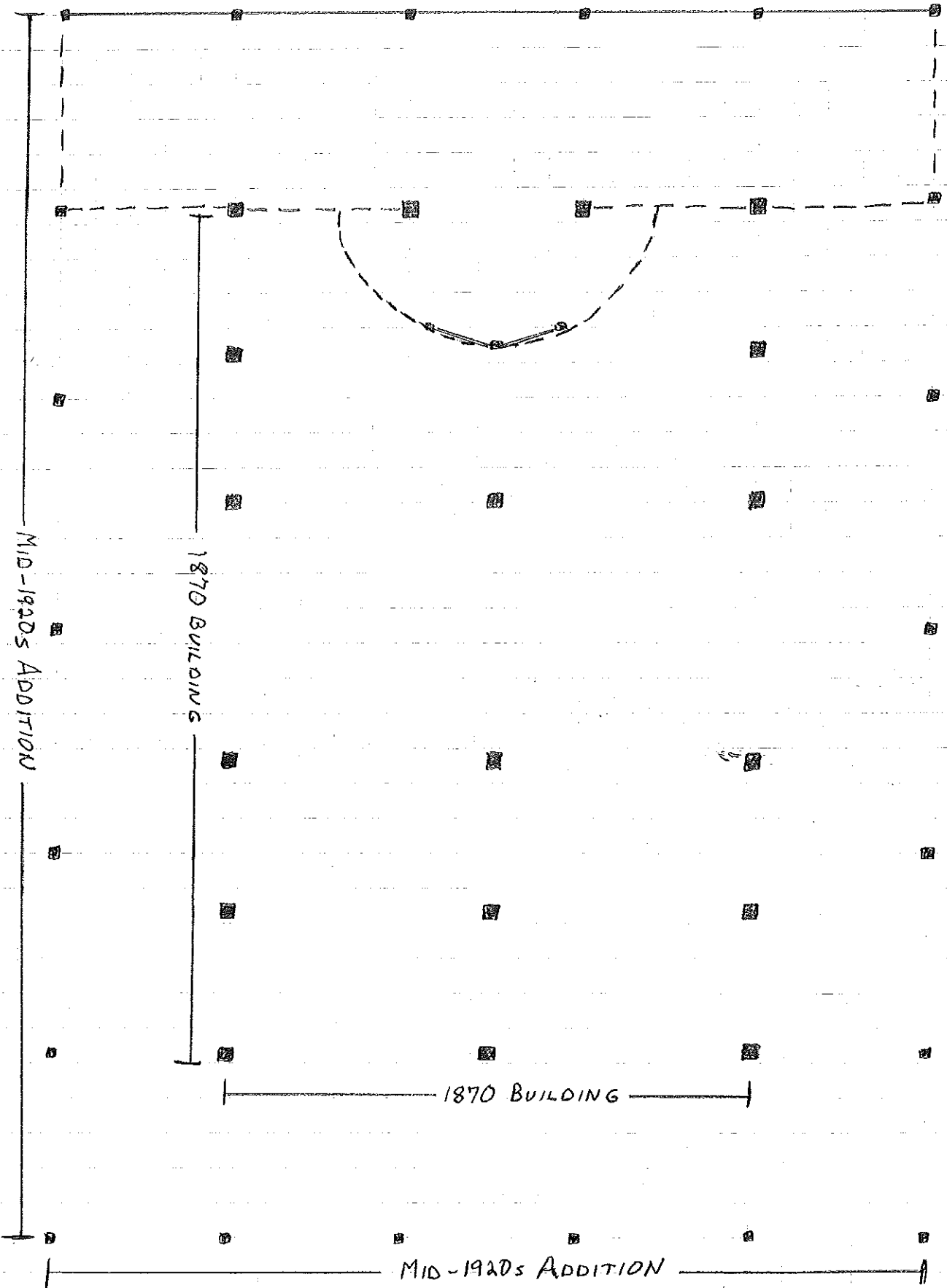
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Davidson County, North Carolina

PHOTOGRAPHS

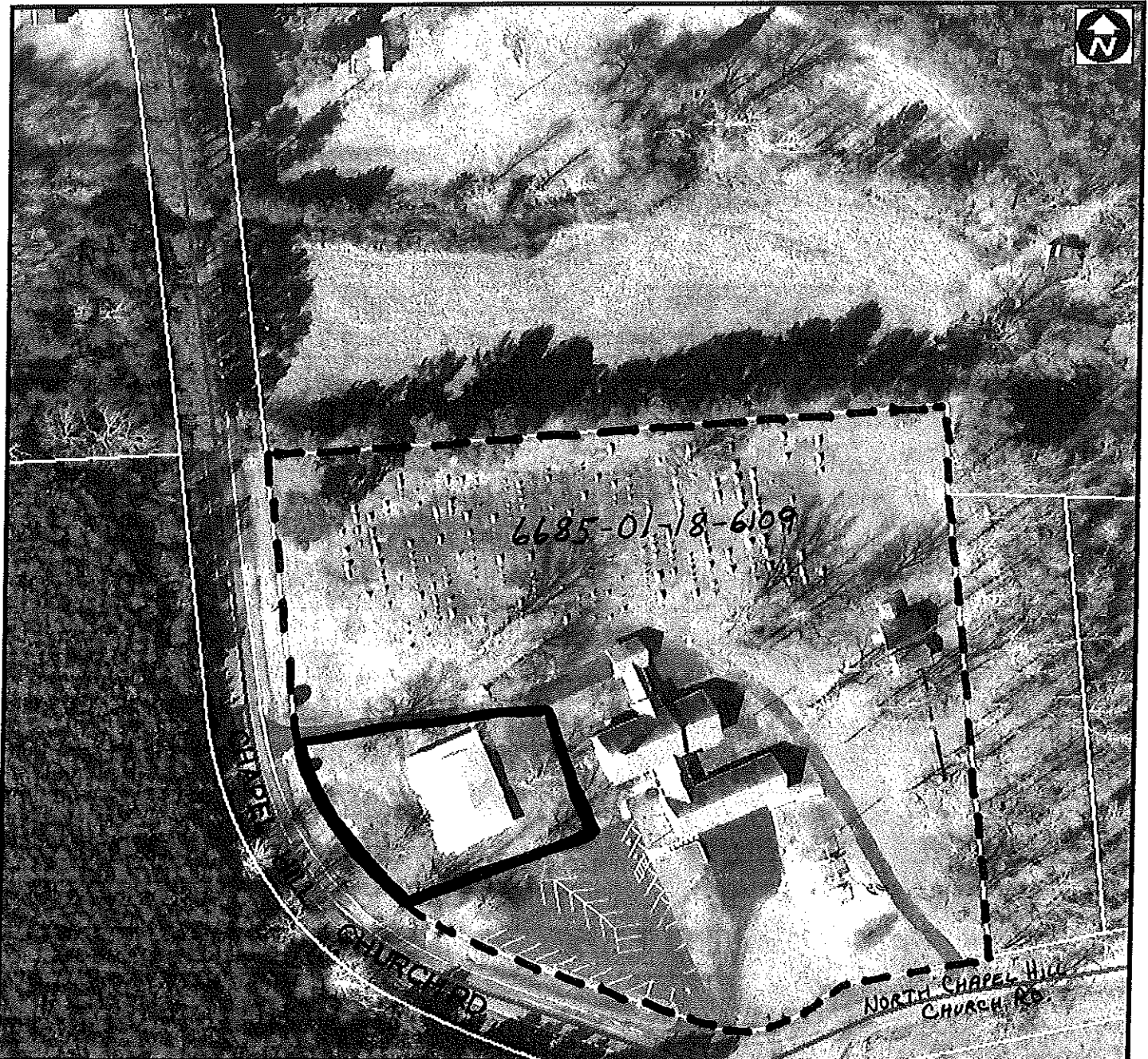
The following information for #1-5 applies to all nomination photographs:

- 1) Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle
- 2) Denver vicinity, Davidson County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) March 24, 2011
- 5) CD: NCHPO, Raleigh, NC
- 6-7)
 - 1: Overall view to northeast
 - 2: Setting in relationship to church and cemetery, view to southeast
 - 3: South end of tabernacle, view to north
 - 4: West side of tabernacle, view to east
 - 5: East side and north end of tabernacle, view to southwest
 - 6: Overall interior, view to southwest
 - 7: Overall interior, view to north
 - 8: Interior, showing original size of tabernacle and modification for expanded roof, view to southwest
 - 9: Interior, preaching platform and choir area at north end, view to northwest
 - 10: Detail, original post with skinned log lower section and hewn upper section



CHAPEL HILL CHURCH TABERNACLE

1457 CHAPEL HILL CHURCH ROAD, DENTON VIC., DAVIDSON COUNTY, NC



Property Map/Tax Map

CHAPEL HILL CHURCH TABERNACLE
1457 Chapel Hill Church Road
Denton vic., Davidson County, NC

----- Boundary of church property,
Parcel 6685-01-18-6109

————— Boundary of nominated property

1 inch = 100 feet