

# 32

State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

Iredell COUNTY

# INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

\_\_\_\_\_  
QUAD

Iredell County

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR \_\_\_\_\_ THEMATIC NOMINATION

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Centre Presbyterian Church, Session House, and Cemetery, including Baker Cemetery  
AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

N & S sides SR 1245, 0.1 mile E of Jct. with SR 1246 NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF Mount Mourne

9th

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

North Carolina

037

Iredell

097

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Centre Presbyterian Church

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Mt. Mourne

\_\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 28123

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Laura A. W. Phillips (Winston-Salem)

ORGANIZATION

Consultant for Survey & Planning Branch

DATE

February 4, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

Archives and History

TELEPHONE

919-733-6545

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Centre Presbyterian Church complex is located on either side of SR 1245, just outside of Mt. Mourne at the southern end of Iredell County. The significant portion of the complex consists of the 1854 church and contemporary session house on the north side of the road and the cemetery surrounded by a dry-laid, low stone wall on the south side of the road.

Centre Church itself is a handsome example of the Greek Revival style as frequently interpreted in the church architecture of Piedmont North Carolina during the mid and late 19th century. Centre Church is especially striking in that it is built of brick, rather than the more usual frame construction. The temple-like feeling is created by the 3 x 4 bay rectangular form with low, pedimented gable-end facade and extra large windows. The center bay of the facade is accented by a large double-leaf door with shuttered window above. The four brick walls of the church are pierced by large 12/9/12 and 16/12/16 triple-hung sash windows with granite sills and wooden lintels. All windows are covered by louvered shutters with iron strap hinges. Both the front steps and the foundation are granite.

The interior of the church has remained relatively unaltered with vestibule in front and sanctuary behind. Double-leaf doors with narrow vertical flat panels lead from the vestibule into the sanctuary. At either end of the vestibule are stairs which lead to the gallery above, which surrounds the sanctuary on three sides. The gallery is enclosed by a low, flat-paneled dado with moulded railing and is supported by slender, very simple Doric posts. Interior walls and ceiling are plastered.

On either side of the church, at the rear, are breezeways which lead to mid-20th century additions. These one and two-story brick additions have been handled in a very sympathetic manner and do not detract from the character of the church.

To the east of the church is situated a tiny 1 X 2 bay frame building--almost a simplified miniature of the main church building--which serves as the session house. Of the same period as the church, the session house has a low gable roof with boxed cornice and wide returns and flush-sheathed gable ends. A wide frieze board encircles the building. A single door, with two vertical flat panels, is located on the front gable end facade, a single shoulder chimney is on the rear, and 6/6 sash windows with louvered shutters are on the sides of the session house. The interior has flush-sheathed walls and a paneled mantel.

Toward the far eastern edge of the church property is a tiny red brick structure, probably used as some form of utility house. Behind the church is a small, 20th century addition to the cemetery. West of the church buildings is a small, fenced-in play yard.

Across the road is the old cemetery surrounded by a low, dry-laid stone wall. Leading into the cemetery are wrought-iron picket gates of a style similar to those found at Coddle Creek ARP Church and St. James Episcopal Church, both in south Iredell County. The gates are attached to granite posts on either side. The cemetery contains several hundred tombstones, many dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The oldest stone dates from 1776 and is that of Col. Alexander Osborne and his wife Agnes. Osborne, a founder of Centre Church, was a Revolutionary War patriot. Other important patriots buried here are Capt. James Houston, Galbraith Falls and John Brevard, among others. Many of the stones exhibit interesting sculptural details--some of which are fairly sophisticated and some of which are almost crude.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Centre Presbyterian Church

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Description (Cont'd)

In the southeastern corner of Centre Church Cemetery is Baker Cemetery, a small family plot containing about fifteen markers, which was moved to its present site in 1961 from its original location 3 1/2 miles southwest, now in Lake Norman. A new marker indicates that Rev. John Thomason, ca. 1690-1753 was buried in Baker Cemetery. He is believed to have been the first minister to preach in what became the Concord Presbytery, having been sent as a missionary by the Synod of Philadelphia in 1751.

West of the cemetery and separated from it by a grove of trees is the mid-20th century manse, a one and one-half-story red brick house with low hipped roof and three bay wide pedimented front entrance porch. It is nestled among the trees and is sympathetic to the church buildings to which it relates.

Centre Presbyterian Church still has an active congregation of around 300 members, and the structural complex of church, session house and cemetery is well preserved. Its heavily wooded setting with open fields beyond maintains its rural atmosphere.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL

\_\_\_\_\_ STATE

LOCAL

## PERIOD

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1854

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Centre Presbyterian Church, located in south Iredell County not far from the Mecklenburg County line, is one of the most historically significant of the early Iredell churches. Established in 1765, this congregation is one of the oldest in the county, while the 1854 church building is likewise one of the oldest of those remaining in Iredell. It was here in 1788 in an earlier structure that the Presbyterian Synod of the Carolinas was formed and held its first session. Architecturally, the simple yet refined brick Greek Revival style church, the small frame session house of similar form, and the cemetery with its hand-carved tombstones, stone wall and decorative ironwork gates are remarkably well-preserved and together form one of the most intact groupings of early church related structures in the county.

## CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- A. Centre Church played a significant role in the development of Iredell County in the second half of the eighteenth century. Established in 1765, it was one of the oldest congregations in a county where the church--the Presbyterian Church in particular--was a focal point in the lives of Scotch-Irish settlers of the area. The Presbyterian Synod of the Carolinas was formed at Centre Church in 1788, the same year that Iredell County was carved out of Rowan.
- C. The present 1854 Centre Church building embodies the distinctive regional Greek Revival characteristics popular in Piedmont North Carolina church architecture of the mid to late nineteenth century. The simple rectangular form, the bold brickwork and pedimented gable end above the main entrance reflect clearly the Greek stylistic origin of the building. The contemporary session house is a miniature reflection in frame of the main church building. The cemetery, surrounded by a low stone wall, contains tombstones from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which exhibit the imaginative artistic talent of area stonecutters. The ironwork cemetery gate is similar in design to those found at Coddle Creek and St. James churches, also in southern Iredell County, and all three may have been forged by the same blacksmith.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the establishment of Centre Presbyterian Church in 1765, Presbyterian missionaries were sent to minister to the needs of the Scotch-Irish settlers in the area that is now the southern part of Iredell County. As early as 1751 John Thomason was sent by the Synod of Philadelphia to preach in the western Rowan area. He remained until his death in 1753, when he was buried in Baker's Graveyard (now a section within the Centre Church Cemetery since the construction of Lake Norman). He was followed by Hugh McAden in 1755.<sup>1</sup>

In 1761 both the Coddle Creek and Davidson's Creek communities made requests to the Synod of New York and Philadelphia for a minister. Official action was not taken until 1764, at which time only one church was allowed. The name "Centre" signifies the central location between the two communities and suggests that its establishment was the result of a compromise.

The first location of the church was two miles north of Davidson College. In 1774 a fire destroyed the original building and Centre was rebuilt at its present location in 1774-1775. That structure was replaced by the present building in 1854.

The first pastor of Centre Church was called in 1777. Thomas Harris McCaule, a native of Pennsylvania and graduate of Princeton College, remained at Centre until 1785, when he was a candidate for governor of North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Centre became an important Presbyterian church in south Iredell, wielding a strong influence in both the religious and educational life of the area. On November 5, 1788, the Synod of the Carolinas was formed and the first meeting held at Centre. On March 19, 1798, the first regular meeting of Concord Presbytery was held here. Other churches, including Prospect, Bethel, Davidson College, Mooresville, and Shearers Chapel have drawn membership for their original congregations from Centre, causing Centre to be sometimes called the "Mother of Churches."<sup>5</sup>

One of the early schools in this area of the county was the school of Robert H. Chapman, formed at Centre in 1828. Chapman taught elementary subjects for \$2.50 a quarter, English grammar and geography for \$3.75 a quarter, and such subjects as mathematics, science, Latin, Greek, French, and painting for \$5.00 a quarter. The school was advertised as "a classical school for both sexes." A female assistant taught the female students "the different branches of useful science, needlework, painting, and the French language."<sup>6</sup>

Centre is still an active Presbyterian church in south Iredell County.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>"Centre Presbyterian Church, A 'Centre' of Religion - It's Heritage, It's Handiwork, It's Hopes" (Church brochure, undated).

<sup>2</sup>Homer M. Kever, Iredell Piedmont County (Iredell County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), p. 78. Hereinafter cited as Kever.

<sup>3</sup>Church Brochure.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 18 (Approx.)

### UTM REFERENCES

A	1,7	5	1,3	3,2,0	3,9	3,4	2,2,0	B	1,7	5	1,3	3,2,0	3,9	3,3	8,8,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING		ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING
C	1,7	5	1,3	0,0,0	3,9	3,3	8,8,0	D	1,7	5	1,3	0,0,0	3,9	3,4	2,2,0

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All of Tract 17, Block B, Map 2H, Davidson Township, as outlined in red on map.

Includes all of church property with its interrelated parts.

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Footnotes (Cont'd)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Kever, pp. 137, 215.

