

(Oct. 1990)

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 Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Northeast of intersection SR 1409 and NC Highway 903 not for publication N/A

city or town Hamilton vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Martin code 117 zip code 27840

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 for 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.)

Shirley ACrows SHPD 3/4/05
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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 count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	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

Funerary: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant: Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Other: front-gable church

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Wood: Weatherboard

roof Asphalt Shingle

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1878

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.

Significant Dates

1878

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

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: _____

Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
Name of Property

Martin County, N. C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.5 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u>	<u>301780</u>	<u>3974330</u>	3	<u>18</u>	<u>301880</u>	<u>3974140</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>18</u>	<u>302050</u>	<u>3974340</u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 Penne Sandbeck/Nomination Preparer
organization Penne Smith Sandbeck & Associates date November 18, 2004
street & number P. O. Box 6363 telephone 919-832-7935
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27628

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 Donald W. Grimes, Spring Green Preservation Fund
street & number 903 Kildare Farm Road telephone 919-469-5443
city or town Cary state NC zip code 27511

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 listing. 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 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
Martin County, North Carolina**Physical Location and Description**

Situated at the northeast junction of a rural crossroads between the Roanoke River towns of Hamilton and Williamston, Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church's pastoral setting has changed little from when this front-gable, frame meeting house was constructed over a century ago. Although the pine and oak trees cited in its December 1878 deed no longer stand, the church and cemetery, which occupy a triangular-shaped, three-and-a-half-acre tract spilling over on either side of Spring Green Road (SR 1409) and N. C. Highway 903, are shaded by pines, an oak, and small flowering trees such as a line of crepe myrtles the Spring Green Preservation Fund planted along the north side of N. C. 903 in the 1980s; the area immediately around the church is bare. Church and cemetery are surrounded by cultivated fields and small patches of pine woods, much as they were throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The overall appearance of Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church is that of a large gabled box. There is its late Greek Revival style discerned by the building's massing, the proportion of doors and windows, and small exterior details such as molded corner pilasters and severely handsome pedimented gable ends, each gable pierced by a small louvered ventilator. Dimensions of the 1879 weatherboarded church are thirty-six feet, four inches wide at its gable ends, and fifty-five feet, four-and-a-half inches long at its side elevations. The building rests on low handmade brick piers with a twentieth-century latticework brick infill. Three elongated six-over-six, double-hung sash windows pierce the church's north and south walls, with two identical windows at the east gable end. Exterior details are mostly unembellished except for applied raised molding at the corner pilasters' "capitals", as it were, where they terminate at the fascia, itself quite plain beneath the roof's prominent gable return and soffit. The corner pilasters, along with the pronounced gable ends and soffit might be considered the most decorative aspect of this unpretentious building. The two six-panel doors, symmetrically placed at the front elevation, are simply fashioned and, as with the windows, surrounds are plain with an overhead drip cap. Above each front elevation entrance bay is a six-over-six, double-hung sash window, equally plain, but the presence of which indicates an interior balcony or gallery. Charming board-and-batten window shutters, each shutter decorated with a jigsaw cutout of an evergreen, replaced the taller windows' earlier louvered shutters, but these replacement shutters are not obtrusive, nor do they compromise the building's integrity. The Spring Green Preservation Fund replaced the church's leaking roof, now asphalt shingles, in the 1990s, and a small brick chimney flue three-quarters toward the east elevation has been retained. At the north elevation's westernmost bay is a side entrance with a modern hollow metal door. This entrance was used by the congregation's African American members and originally opened into an interior stair to the upper gallery. During the twentieth century, the church removed the stair and put a bathroom in its place. In 1999 the bathroom was removed, and, with the help of earlier ghost marks and structural clues, an interior stair is being refashioned.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
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A few small concessions to modern times have been made, beginning with the 1940s brick and concrete steps at each front entrance, which also have metal rails. The north entrance has replacement cast concrete steps. But all alterations undertaken by the Spring Green Preservation Fund, who now own the former church, were with the intent of returning the building to its original appearance. Inside, where water damage destroyed plaster walls, sheetrock sheathing has been laid in place and replacement wainscoting has been created along the west wall, where there was also damage, to be identical to original wainscoting. Also, a corresponding interior bathroom at the church's south end has been removed. The tall posts running across the room from each gable end were removed during the early twentieth century, the congregation not realizing their structural support of the roof; they were, however, replaced in the 1990s. Window panes have been replaced because of vandalism during the 1970s and 1980s. None of these additions—or removals—detracts from the building's intrinsic character. A small painted sign with the name of the church, itself a replacement of an earlier sign, hangs between the two gallery windows.

Through either front door, the interior view is the same—a large room, with plaster walls, low tongue-and-groove wainscoting accented by a small chair rail and, above, a flat painted tongue-and-groove pine board ceiling. Original pine flooring, the boards approximately six inches wide, has been retained. As with nearly all nineteenth-century Primitive Baptist churches seen in eastern North Carolina, a line of tall support posts run down the middle of the room from between the entrance doors to the east end's raised dais that is known as the "preaching stand". Originally, the large posts served as a dividing line between men and women, who entered through the two separate entrances and sat on either side of the room; however by the mid-twentieth century this gender separation had ceased at all of Martin County's Primitive Baptist churches.¹ Presently, there are no light fixtures in the room but there is indication that Spring Green's congregation installed suspended electric lighting from the tongue-and-groove ceiling during the 1930s or 1940s.

The preaching stand, built between 1879 and 1900, is positioned between the two east elevation windows. It is on a raised demilune base, accessed by steps on either side of the wall, and sheathed at the base with vertical tongue-and-groove siding; above is a simple rail balustrade with a curved handrail on either side of the center lectern, also made of pine.

The upper gallery is visible when facing the west elevation from the preaching stand. It is simply executed, a balcony running across the west wall that is faced with vertical tongue-and-groove pine siding with a simple chair rail. The gallery is supported by three sturdy chamfered pine posts, approximately nine feet high.

Furnishings are understated and solely for the purpose of assembly and ceremony. Three rows of pine pews divide the sacred space, creating two main aisles between the gallery and preaching stand. This sizable seating reminds

¹ Ernest Capps, Williamston, N. C., conversation with Penne Smith Sandbeck, April 25, 2000.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
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one of how large and influential a role this church played with local society during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The communion table and sidechairs below the preaching stand are plain pieces, dating from the late nineteenth century, with split oak seats; ladderback chairs, also with split oak seats, are positioned along the preacher stand's east wall. On either side of the east wall, below the preaching stand, are three pews perpendicular to congregational seating; this arrangement of pews is known as the "amen corner", and church elders, visiting dignitaries, and older personages were seated here.

Spring Green's burial ground is at the southwest corner of N. C. Highway 903 and SR 1409, cater-cornered from the church. There is little landscaping, but pine trees and dogwoods were planted at the southern edge of the cemetery. Many of the grave vaults and markers are from the first quarter of the twentieth century, but there are some earlier and later burials. Decedents' surnames—Roberson, Coffield, Rives, Everette, Smith, Mosley, Whitfield, Hardison—are names still frequently seen in Martin County. Most of the markers and plots are in the Roebuck, Grimes, White, and Taylor families, all of whom have farmed this region since the mid-nineteenth century. Of particular note are eight brick raised vaults alongside one another at the cemetery's southeast section; vaults and markers were covered with concrete in the early twentieth century, but all of them—including two barrel-shaped vaults whose legible inscriptions link them to the Taylor family—are raised and their pointed markers were clearly crafted to be impressive, an unusual aspect in a Primitive Baptist churchyard.

More in keeping with the reserved and understated tradition of Primitive Baptism is the lone surviving cypress knob marker, probably fashioned in the nineteenth century's third quarter, standing in the cemetery's western edge. According to a local historian, this is the only such marker left in the cemetery, but other shaped cypress markers, once the marker of choice for antebellum Baptists and Quakers, still remain in Martin County. It was not inscribed, although a well-meaning soul affixed a metal funeral home label marker to its front that, during the mid-twentieth century, would have told the name of the family who lay under this marker; but, though the 1940s or 1950s script has faded and vanished behind the funeral home label, the cypress marker remains intact, a rare example of earlier funerary practices in eastern North Carolina.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
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Statement of Significance

As a plain, unadorned building constructed in 1878 to serve as a place of worship, Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church has maintained this function and purpose in its 126-year existence with little alteration to its exterior or interior. The church building's structural intactness and integrity are exemplary of the traditional front-gable frame meeting house format espoused by the Primitive Baptists and other nineteenth-century Protestant groups in North Carolina and elsewhere in the South. Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church is also one of five regional extant houses of worship within the denomination retaining an upper gallery, traditionally the seating space for African Americans before, during, and just after the Civil War. The church's overall integrity has remained strong, however, where many other denominations' comparable buildings have either been augmented or cast aside. As such, Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church is eligible for listing under Criterion C for Architecture. As a religious property, Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church meets Criterion Consideration A for its intact design, typical of regional antebellum meeting houses, and construction.

Historical Background

The rural community of Spring Green is positioned approximately nine miles northwest of the county seat, Williamston, and six miles southeast of the nineteenth-century village of Hamilton (known in the eighteenth century as Hog Town). By 1811 there were enough area residents—seventeen—interested in forming a meeting, and so the first Spring Green meeting house was established on the south side of N. C. Highway 903, across from where the 1879 building stands. In that year, Spring Green Meeting House was accepted into the consortium of Baptist meeting houses in northeastern North Carolina known as the Kehukee Association, formed in 1765 under the supervision of the Philadelphia Association, who sent many to win the souls of those in North Carolina and Virginia. These meetings shared the Calvinistic views of Particular Baptists, a sect of the denomination espousing predestination of the “elect”, the necessity of a personal and professed experience of grace for redemption, and baptism by direct immersion in water.¹

¹ Don Y. Gordon, *Like Drops of Morning Dew: A Concise History of North Carolina Baptists* (Winston-Salem, N. C.: North Carolina Baptist Historical Committee, 1999). In this work, Gordon describes the Particular Baptists' North Carolina predecessors as being General Baptists, who were less Calvinistic in doctrine, believing in man's free will (for better or for worse) but also that redemption was available for more than a select few. Paul Palmer, a General Baptist from New England, established the first Baptist meeting houses in North Carolina in the 1720s but were a minor voice in the state by the 1740s and 1750s when Particular Baptists and the more evangelical Separate Baptists became predominant. Also, Cushing Biggs Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, *History of The Church of God* (first published 1885), Chapter 21 p. 5. Published verbatim online at www.primitivebaptist.org/writers/hassell/history.

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According to church history, Spring Green's humble first building was of log construction with a dirt floor, one entrance door, and one window directly behind the pulpit.² A comparable meeting house was probably Conoho, near present-day Oak City; Conoho Chapel, also of log construction, was built in 1794 and not replaced by a frame building until the 1850s.³ Although small and humble, it was nevertheless used by the Kehukee Association for their 1838 annual meeting, attended by local congregations and visiting elders. Elder William Hyman, who served Spring Green in the 1820s and 1830s, was the meeting's moderator.⁴ Another Kehukee Association annual meeting was held at Spring Green in 1847.

The Spring Green Meeting House was renovated and expanded in 1851, and in June 1855 Joshua Taylor, a local planter, deeded three acres to the church, roughly the church's present site.⁵ Taylor's deed to Spring Green contains one particularly timely citation:

... the Baptist Church commonly called and known as the Old School or Primitive Baptist Church worshipping at Spring Green Meeting House...⁶

The word "Primitive" was, in the mid-nineteenth century, only beginning to be employed to define this branch of the Baptist faith. Beforehand, these austere Protestants might have described themselves as Particular Baptists, rather than the "General Baptists" who believed in redemption for all people, not just the elect. In contemporary written Confession of Faiths within Kehukee Association churches, one article states, "We believe that God before the foundation of the world for a purpose of his own glory did Elect a certain number of men and angels to eternal life and that this Election is Particular, eternal, and unconditional on the Creator's part."⁷ These Particular Baptists would also have explained that they did not adhere with the Separate Baptists, yet another offshoot of the Baptist sect. The "father" of the Separate Baptists was Shubal Stearns, a New Englander who,

² Thomas R. Butchko, *Martin Architectural Heritage* (Williamston: Martin County Historical Society, 1998), pp. 215-216, 260. Francis Manning and W. H. Booker, *Religion and Education in Martin County, 1774-1974* (Williamston, N. C.: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 152-153.

³ Butchko, p. 12.

⁴ Hassell, Chapter 23, p. 2; Manning and Booker, pp. 152-153.

⁵ Martin County Register of Deeds, Book Q, pp. 262-263 [Joshua Taylor>William Brown, R. Hassell, Trustees of Spring Green Meeting House].

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Bear Grass Ledger One, "A Confession of Faith", ca. May 1829. A transcription of Skewarkey Meeting House's Confession of Faith, nearly identical to Bear Grass, is in Manning and Booker, pp. 74-76.

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transformed by hearing George Whitefield preach in the 1740s, established this branch of Baptists. The “New Lights”, as they were also called, saw a religious conversion as the Holy Spirit directly entering a human’s soul and sought to win more souls to God rather than letting converts come forward of their own, unsolicited, accord.⁸ Such evangelicalism would have been anathema to many of these Martin County farmers, small planters, and millers, who mistrusted the ways of the world and were wary of institutions and the corrosive effect of commerce in religion.⁹

But twenty-two years earlier in 1828, eastern North Carolina’s Baptists entered a profound schism that would delineate the various groups sheltered under a “Baptist” umbrella more distinctly. As early as 1803 the Kehukee Association had been debating a question submitted by Martin Ross, one of Skewarkey Meeting House’s earliest pastors and well-respected in the Association. Ross’ query was “Is not the Kehukee Association... called on to step forward in support of that missionary spirit which the great God is so wonderfully re-giving amongst the different denominations of the world?”¹⁰

The Kehukee Association’s ultimate answer, as well as other Baptist associations who took a dim eye of missions and other forms of evangelical outreach, was to stamp out missionary societies within the Association; this occurred in 1827. Later Primitive Baptists hailed the move as “a great decisive stand taken... against worldly institutions”, and a decision predating Maryland Primitive Baptists’ historic Black Rock Address by five years; the 1832 Black Rock Address, like the Kehukee Association’s proscription, further eschewed the trend of becoming more evangelical and, as perceived by them, more commercially oriented.¹¹ It was around this time that the terms “Old School” or “Primitive” were first employed to describe these conservative Baptists. “Old School” was noted in

⁸ Gordon, pp. 11-13. Stearns himself moved from Connecticut to what is now Randolph County, North Carolina, establishing a meeting house at Sandy Creek. His Separate Baptist, or “New Light” movement is considered the forerunner of the present-day mainstream Baptist denomination.

⁹ Melanie Sovine Reid, “Neither Adding Nor Taking Away’: The Care and Keeping of Primitive Baptist Church Houses,” in Camille Wells (ed.), *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Volume I (Annapolis, MD: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1982), p. 171. Also, Cushing Biggs Hassell is very eloquent on the subject of serving God or serving Mammon in his *History*, Chapter 21, pp. 2-3 (online version).

¹⁰ Sylvester Hassell, *History of the Church of God*, chapter 21. () Online www.primitivebaptist.org/writers/hassell/history/chapter21.asp

¹¹ Hassell, chapter 21, page 2 of 20; “The Black Rock Address”, reprinted online at www.pb.org/pbdocs/blakrock.html. Melanie Sovine Reid offers the additional Primitive Baptist insight that the missionary movement was seen “as human devices to artificially increase the number of souls that might expect to gain entry into heaven,” yet “no amount of human activity of persuasion could change the eternal destiny of a soul” (pp. 172-173).

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the Black Rock Address as an outside term that they “were led to adopt... in our use of it we have reference to the school of Christ, in distinction from all other schools which have sprung up since the apostles’ days.”¹² The term “Primitive” came from a similar philosophy, more ideal in inspiration than pejorative. These Baptists, with their hardworking rural existence and few worldly pleasures, saw themselves as the continuance of the first Apostles, and thus “Primitive” was a conscious association with the early days of Christianity.¹³

In the eyes of the Primitive Baptists, there was a place for acceptance of converts. In the Primitive Baptist “Decorum or rule of Conference”, there is an article defining protocol for new members. “A door shall be opened when thought necessary,” the article begins, “but none shall be admitted but by unanimous consent and shall first verbally relate their [experience] or give an account of the work of God on their souls and secondly of their faith and principles if the church shall require it.” In addition to this, enquiries were made in the community regarding the moral standing of the convert, and only after these matters had been satisfied was the person welcomed as a new member and baptized.¹⁴ It was a careful, exacting process contributing to there being few in number.

The Missionary Baptist movement and the Disciples of Christ movement claimed many Primitive or Old School Baptists, including some of the congregations in the Kehukee Association’s counterparts, such as the Chowan Association (located north of the Roanoke River) and the Neuse Association (located mostly south of the Tar River).¹⁵ Martin Ross, by now an old man, left the Primitive Baptists to foster Missionary Baptist congregations in Bertie and Perquimans counties. However, because of their strong roots in Martin County, Skewarkey, Bear Grass, Spring Green, and other congregations weathered the storm and managed to prosper during the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶ The Skewarkey Union, a regional subdivision of the Kehukee Association, was revived in 1841, with Bear Grass and Smithwick’s Creek as members, and Spring Green and Picot Meeting Houses

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Reid, p. 171.

¹⁴ Bear Grass Ledger, “A Decorum, or rule of Conference,” ca. May 1829, article 5.

¹⁵ Hassell, chapter 21, p. 3 of 20. Sandra Hayslette in her Master’s Thesis, “Missions, Markets, and Men: A Baptist Contest of Values in Tarboro, North Carolina, 1800-1835” (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, History Department, 1995), brings up the important argument that many Primitive Baptists who became Missionary Baptists did so because the rise in their socioeconomic status from their communities becoming commercial centers led them to believe that financial progress and religious progress (i. e., a dynamic missionary movement) were not mutually exclusive (p. 29).

¹⁶ Manning and Booker, pp. 10-13.

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infrequently cited as members.¹⁷ However, other members of the Skewarkey Union note visits from Spring Green's elders, one being Eli McCaskey, who often moderated at Bear Grass Primitive Baptist Church and other meetings during the 1850s, suggesting there was considerable contact between the churches within the Union and Spring Green.¹⁸ The Primitive Baptist historian Cushing Biggs Hassell took a great interest in Spring Green, noting that he frequently served as pastor there from 1847 until 1880 and, during that time, baptized 120 of her congregants.¹⁹

It could be argued that the schism made the Primitive Baptists cling ever more tightly to their tenets, particularly gender separation during services. In this sect, women were a subordinate presence in worship and business procedures, separated from their husbands during the service and admonished not to speak in meeting unless "in cases of conscience or such particular circumstances that the nature of thing may require it." At foot-washing ceremonies, emulating the agape of Jesus and his disciples, the record dictated that "each Brother should wash one anothers (sic.) feet... and the Sisters in like manner to do the same of one another."²⁰ This separation by gender necessitated the two front doors, whereby men and women entered separately and sat separately, the tall interior post supports serving as a dividing line. Separation by gender was not a new practice—Quakers and other denominations had practiced gender separation for generations. However, Primitive Baptists' adherence to this practice, where other churches were letting go of it, may have been reinforced by perceptions propagated by some that if women became more powerful in the church, as what seemed to be happening with Missionary Baptists and Methodists, they would subvert religious authority and procedure.²¹ The practice of gender separation during worship was perpetuated at this particular church until approximately 1950 but few living members remember it.²²

The Civil War, difficult for all, was particularly tense for those who attended the 1862 annual Kehukee Association meeting, held that year at Spring Green.²³ As Cushing Biggs Hassell recalled:

¹⁷ Manning and Booker, 73. Manning does not mention Picot, but it is mentioned in the Skewarkey Record Book.

¹⁸ Bear Grass Ledger, 1828-1899 (records in 1851 and 1854). Also, Hassell, Chapter 23, pp. 15, 16 (1853-1854).

¹⁹ Manning and Booker, p. 152.

²⁰ Skewarkey Record Book, July 1788.

²¹ Hayslette, pp. 14-25.

²² Ben and Sadie Harrison, Bear Grass, N. C., conversation with Penne Sandbeck, November 9, 2003. Mrs. Harrison recalled that men and women sat separately until "just after the Second World War." Judy Raynor, Skewarkey Church's warden, said in May 2000 that gender separation ended there at approximately the same time. Ernest Capps, a longtime member of Spring Green Church, discussed this matter briefly during a April 25, 2000, conversation but Mr. Capps, who was in his seventies, said he did not remember a time that men and women sat apart at Spring Green. The Harrisons felt that the conditions of the Second World War, when men and women often worked side by side in factories and government agencies, may have spurred the move toward ending gender separation, but it is just as likely the practice had been fading for some years beforehand.

²³ According to Manning and Booker (p. 153), the second Spring Green meeting house burned in 1861, but, given the war, it is hard to imagine the Kehukee Association meeting there if there were no building to congregate in. There is no mention of a fire or of a new building in Cushing Biggs Hassell's *History* minutes.

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The Northern forces held possession of Plymouth, on the Roanoke River [less than thirty miles downstream from Hamilton], and a large portion of Eastern North Carolina, and it was feared by many that they would send their boats up the river and throw shells among the people while holding the Association; but they did not do so, and those who were at the meeting were unmolested during the entire three days.²⁴

A glance at a map further reveals the peril Spring Green's visitors and members were in. Fort Branch, a Confederate earthwork fort, had been positioned on the Roanoke River southeast of Hamilton as a barrier between Union forces and important resources such as Weldon's railroad bridge and the *C. S. S. Albemarle*, the Confederate ironclad vessel then under construction.²⁵ There had been a raid earlier that year, but Union soldiers would not approach the area en masse until 1864, which would also prove unsuccessful.²⁶

Between 1862 and 1878, little is known about events at Spring Green. Minute books from 1811 until 1865 are said to have been burned during the war. Other records, covering the years from 1865 to 1878, have not been found. Cushing Biggs Hassell and Sylvester Hassell's Primitive Baptist compendium, *A History of the Church of God*, informs on some of those "lost years". Bryant Bennett served the Spring Green Meeting House from 1852 until his death from cancer in 1884. Another elder was Stephen William Outterbridge (1824-1915), a local farmer and educator. Outterbridge, who became a church deacon in 1870, was a teacher and landowner; a progressive voice in northern Martin County, Outterbridge owned a 460-acre farm in Hamilton Township, where he successfully produced cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes using local fertilizer sources, rather than resorting to exported guano.²⁷ His energy and enterprising nature made him an important voice in Spring Green's affairs, as well as with the Kehukee Association, where he frequently served as a clerk, or was drafted to visit sister associations such as the Contentnea Association (Greene, Wayne, and parts of Edgecombe and Lenoir Counties), or Country Line Association, composed of communities in the western Coastal Plain and Eastern Piedmont.²⁸ Another Spring Green deacon at that time was Richard Dillard Matthews, a doctor who lived in Hamilton.²⁹ In December 1878 Outterbridge and Matthews represented Spring Green when Franklin and Ida Taylor deeded five acres to the church.³⁰ Once the land was secured, work quickly began on "large new house of worship", the

²⁴ Hassell, Chapter 22, pp. 20-21.

²⁵ Butchko, pp. 214, 246-247.

²⁶ Ibid. Butchko mentions that in the end, Fort Branch was mostly destroyed by retreating Confederate troops in April 1865.

²⁷ Butchko, p. 252; Manning and Booker, p. 153.

²⁸ Hassell, Chapter 23, pp. 31-34 (covering the years 1876-1880)

²⁹ Butchko, p. 223; Manning and Booker, p. 153.

³⁰ Martin County Register of Deeds, Deed Book AA, pp. 772-774.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
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present church building, and was completed within three weeks.³¹ When the Kehukee Association had their annual meeting at Spring Green that summer, the *Tarboro Southerner* reported the new church to be “the largest Primitive Baptist Church in the State.”³² By 1885, membership at Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church was at 103 persons; at that time, it was one of forty-one churches within the Kehukee Association, which, overall, boasted 1,891 members in 1885.³³

Increased members also meant increased decedents. In 1883 local farmer Jesse Irvin Taylor and his wife Isabella (“Izza”) deeded one-quarter of an acre to the church for a burying ground, “on the west side of the road leading from Spring Green.”³⁴ This plot may have already been employed; the cypress discoid marker at the cemetery’s center is a rare example of an antebellum grave marker. However, the earliest inscribed marker seen in the Spring Green cemetery is that of Margaret L. Roberson (1847-1887), although the Taylor family vaults, whose inscriptions have worn away, may predate her.

As attendance fell throughout Primitive Baptist churches in the twentieth century, Spring Green was hit especially hard. In the 1980s, after several longtime members such as W. E. Grimes and E. C. Harrison serving as pastors, and Lucy Grimes Capps, Alton White, and W. A. Ross serving as clerks, had either passed on or were too infirm to perform their duties, Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church ceased operation in the early 1980s.³⁵ The following ten years were difficult for former members and their families as they watched the church building deteriorate from neglect and vandalism. Happily, Grimes family descendants, along with interested Martin County citizens, formed a group, the Spring Green Preservation Fund, and were able to obtain the three and a half acre church parcel from the Kehukee Association (and a .072-acre parcel from E. C. Harrison.)³⁶ Since 1995, the Spring Green Preservation Fund has been carefully restoring the building, safeguarding the property, and exploring the possibility of their former church becoming a house of worship once again.³⁷

³¹ Butchko, p. 260; Manning and Booker, p. 153.

³² Butchko, p. 260. Actually, Spring Green’s physical dimensions, at 36’4” by 55’ 4 1/2” are smaller than two other contemporary Martin County churches, particularly Skewarkey Primitive Baptist Church (44’ 4” by 60’ 4 1/2”) since both have upper galleries.

³³ Manning and Booker, p. 153; Hassell, Chapter 23, p. 41.

³⁴ Martin County Register of Deeds, Book EE, Page 618; Butchko, p. 298.

³⁵ Butchko, p. 260; Manning and Booker, pp. 154-155; Ernest Capps, May 31, 2000, conversation with Penne Sandbeck (Mrs. Capps was his mother and a cousin of W. E. Grimes, who was Spring Green’s pastor from 1936 until 1968).

³⁶ Martin County Register of Deeds, Book C-17, p. 74. This was a remarkable event; according to Tim Mattimoe’s “Preserving the Rural Church: North Carolina’s Historic Primitive Baptist Church House”, online at www.sacredplaces.org/PSP-InfoClearingHouse/articles/Preserving/the/Rural/Church, the Kehukee Association has not been enthusiastic about deeding former houses of worship to preservation groups. According to Mattimoe, who was involved in the attempt to preserve the set down Blount’s Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Beaufort County, the Kehukee Association refused to deed the building, possibly because non-Primitive Baptists would be involved in the restoration and adaptive reuse of the building.

³⁷ Spring Green Preservation Fund, Inc., 1999 minutes (courtesy Fred Harrison, Jr.); Fred Harrison, Jr., conversation with Penne Sandbeck at Spring Green follow-up site visit, March 15, 2003.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
Martin County, North Carolina

Architectural Context

As few other denominations can claim, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century meeting houses established by Primitive Baptists throughout North Carolina, as well as other parts of the South and Midwest, convincingly connect form with function. Eschewing worldly things, a Primitive Baptist meeting house, with its plain, front-gable form and double entrances, is the outward and visible sign of an intrinsic practicality where, though loved for its connection to earlier generations and its place as a sanctuary, the building is, nevertheless, a means to an end.³⁸ In the words of a Primitive Baptist, “This is a building: *we* are the church.”³⁹

This simplicity of form with little to no exterior ornament is echoed within the meeting house itself, where the focal point from every bench is the preaching stand at the entrance’s opposing wall. At their respective sides of the church, men and women listened intently to the elder or pastor’s message for them as revealed through Scripture. Until the 1920s, the light from the tall double-hung sash windows was sufficient by which to read the Bible or the small hymnals, and to observe the preacher at his stand.⁴⁰ Benches were simple, and cushions were not seen in the building until the twentieth century. Walls were unpainted, or just whitewashed. There were no stained glass windows, no murals from the Old or New Testament, no choir stall with fancy molding, or any other features deemed nonessential or distracting.⁴¹ At other interior features—corner entrance closets, electric lighting, small aisle carpet runners, and cast iron woodstoves—were eventually incorporated, one imagines, with the judicious hesitation described by Melanie Sovine Reid whereby “they are made to everyone’s agreement, but not necessarily to everyone’s satisfaction.”⁴² The care and attention members gave these building, however, underscores the fact that Primitive Baptists operated from spiritual, rather than physical, motives; they did not overly invest in their meeting houses, but they faithfully maintained them and, after decades of unsentimental maintenance and augmentation, came to revere their very plainness and lack of artifice. This is one reason why Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church has not only remained as intact as it has, but also is being restored by descendants of earlier members to its early twentieth-century interior.⁴³

There was no definitive template for a Primitive Baptist meeting house, and the basic form—a frame, front-gable weatherboarded building with two front entrances—is employed by other rural churches, including

³⁸ Drucilla H. York, Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church NR nomination, p. 8.8.

³⁹ Ben Harrison, Bear Grass, N. C., conversation with Penne Sandbeck, November 9, 2003.

⁴⁰ York, 8.9.

⁴¹ James L. Peacock and Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., *Pilgrims of Paradox: Calvinism and Experience among the Primitive Baptists of the Blue Ridge* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp. 106-109. Peacock and Tyson’s description of a Primitive Baptist church in western North Carolina is quintessential of these meeting houses.

⁴² Reid, p. 174.

⁴³ York, 8.8.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
Martin County, North Carolina

Methodist, Missionary Baptist, and Christian (Disciples of Christ or Church of God) denominations. However, by the mid-nineteenth century two variations of form were seen in Martin County and elsewhere in eastern North Carolina. In addition to the more common one-story meeting houses, there was the form seen at Skewarkey (1858), Spring Green, and Conoho (demolished 1970s), Kehukee (1870), and Tarboro (1830, altered 1880), a front-gable meeting house whose double-hung sash windows over each front door signify the presence of an interior gallery, where slaves and free blacks would have been seated.⁴⁴ These latter meeting houses were located in areas where there were, or had been, large antebellum farms and plantations. A vestige of this plan is seen at Singleton Primitive Baptist Church in Washington, North Carolina, built circa 1893. Like Skewarkey and Spring Green, access to the upper balcony is from an outside door leading to an enclosed stair. Why Singleton chose to employ this plan is not known, but it is likely that, as an urban Primitive Baptist church (itself an anomaly) like Tarboro, there were African American members who chose to stay on.

By the time Spring Green built its “large new house of worship” in 1878, the Civil War had been over for thirteen years. Robersonville was in its infancy, but remnants of Hamilton Township’s agrarian aristocracy were still major participants in the meeting house. It is not known how many, or if any African Americans were attending the meeting house by that time, given that contemporary church minutes have not been located. Two theories come to mind: either there were African American members who continued with the church in the 1870s, or the congregation built a gallery because they wanted to replicate their earlier church as much as possible. Size and accommodation were not an issue; the 103 church members in 1885 would have been quite comfortable on the lower level. As Primitive Baptists did not have Sunday Schools, there would have been no need for separate quarters for children. Because they were practical people, however, it is difficult to imagine Primitive Baptists constructing a gallery they did not need.⁴⁵ Another theory could be that Spring Green’s elders built the gallery for future African Americans who might feel the call of the Almighty to enter and make a full confession of faith, and relate their experience of divine grace.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ York, 8.9.

⁴⁵ Records for Singleton Primitive Baptist Church show that its predecessor, the Washington Regular Baptist Church, had comparatively few African American members. No minutes are known to survive for Singleton, but Tim Mattimoe, a regional authority on Primitive Baptist churches, has said it is unlikely there were African American members there by the early twentieth century (Tim Mattimoe, written e-mail communication to Penne Sandbeck, March 2004). This places Spring Green and Singleton, as post-Civil War churches employing antebellum devices, on common ground but said ground could just as easily shift if more documentation were to be revealed.

⁴⁶ Church minutes, at the time of this nomination, could not be located. Manning and Booker cite one area Primitive Baptist Church, Jones Chapel, founded by African Americans in 1892, but it is not known if the founding members, Simon and John Cherry, had been members of Spring Green (p. 166).

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
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The number of Primitive Baptist churches still standing in Martin County—Bear Grass, Skewarkey, Spring Green, Smithwick's Creek, and Robersonville—is remarkable. But these buildings are nevertheless endangered cultural resources, and their vanishing congregations present these buildings with a dilemma as to what their function would become when they are no longer houses of worship. In the past, such buildings were converted to other uses, such as storage or homes, or they were torn down. Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church, set down in the 1980s, might have suffered a similar fate except that the church's last member formed the Spring Green Preservation Group and the Kehukee Association agreed to deed them the church and lot.⁴⁷ Presently, as they finish restoration, the Spring Green group is entertaining a number of options, including that it may become a church for another denomination.⁴⁸ Robersonville Primitive Baptist Church, acquired by another member from the Kehukee Association, is now an art museum, a use that other Primitive Baptists have expressed ambivalence about; there is well-founded concern that some alternative uses "trivialize the real historic meaning of these buildings."⁴⁹ The members of Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church wish to preserve their church as an artifact of the austere faith and passionate belief of their ancestors, but they also wish to, within certain bounds that respect the building's original form, function, and plan, have their church be a true house of worship once more.

⁴⁷ Martin County Register of Deeds, Book C-17:74 [Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association>Spring Green Preservation Fund, Inc., 1999].

⁴⁸ Fred Harrison, Jr., Williamston, N. C. Conversation with Penne Sandbeck, April 13, 2003.

⁴⁹ Tim Mattimoe, Greenville, N. C. Written communication (e-mail) to Penne Sandbeck, June 6, 2003.

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Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church
Martin County, North Carolina

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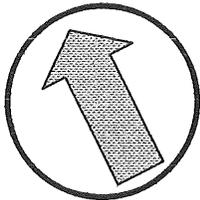
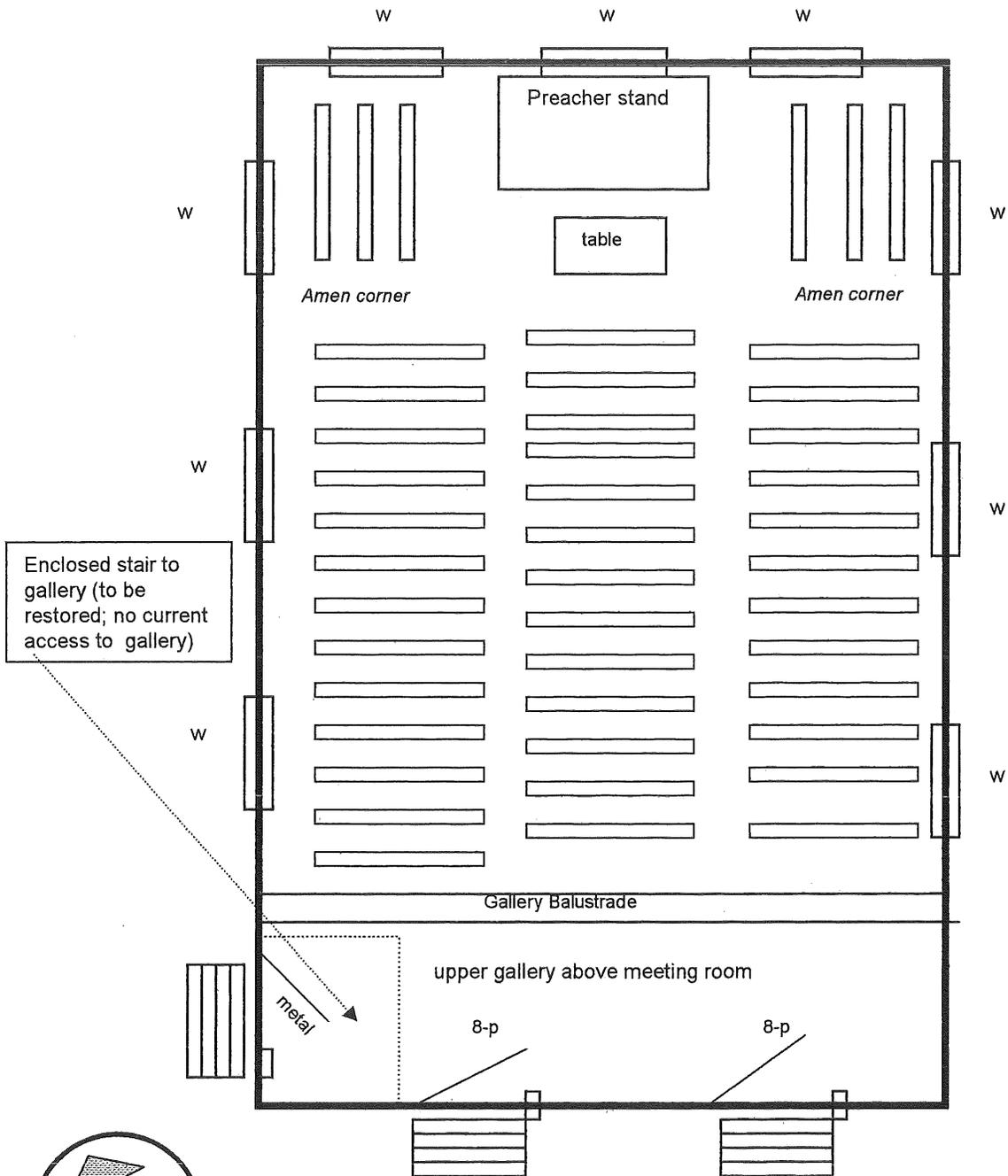
Verbal Boundary Description

The three-and-a-half-acre and additional .072 acre property on which the Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church and Cemetery stand is the same tract as deeded to the Spring Green Preservation Fund by the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church Association, who historically held title to the land (Martin County Register of Deeds, Book C-17, p. 74, and is identified on Martin County (North Carolina) Tax Map 5738, Tract Number 6442.

Boundary Justification

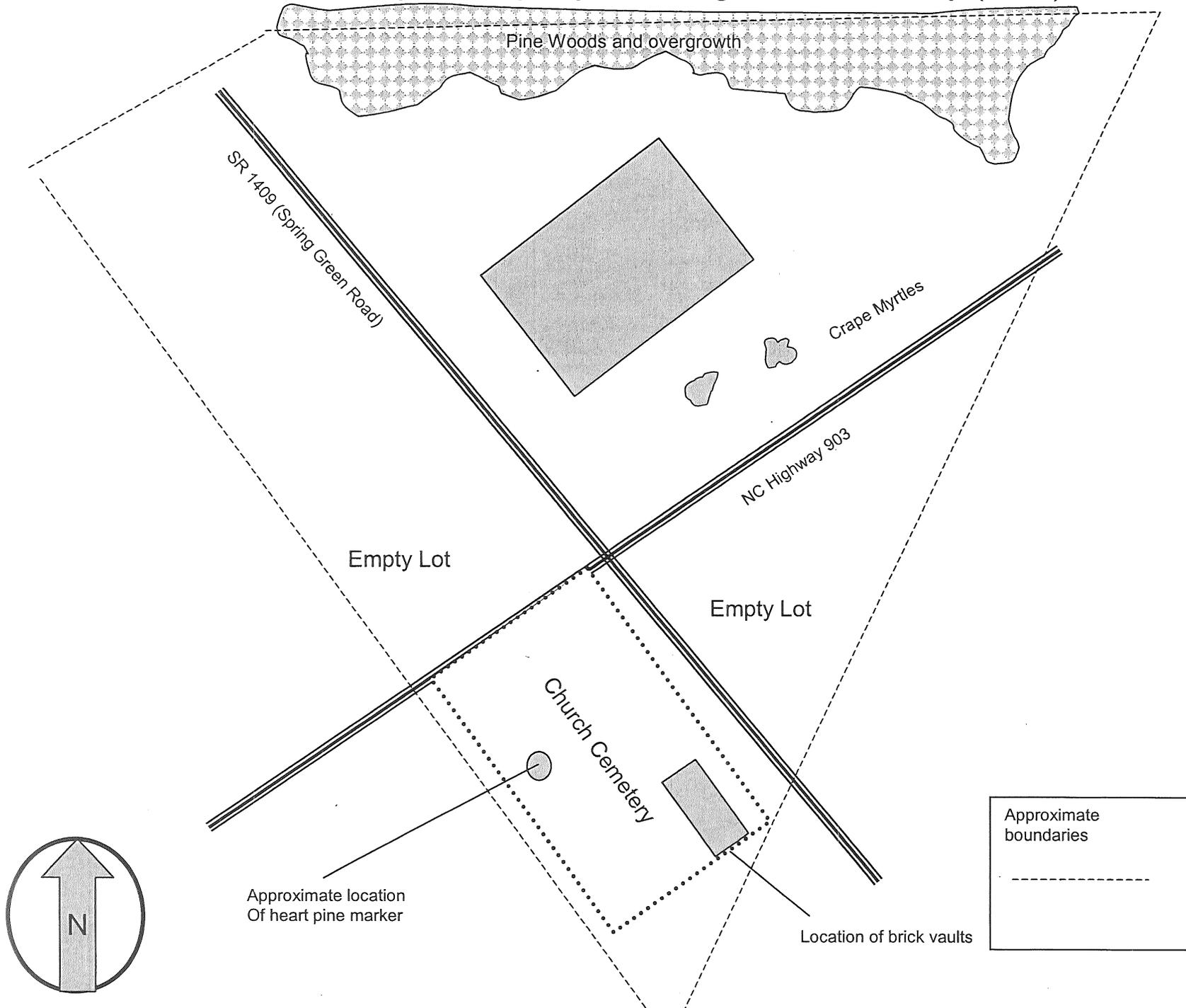
The nominated property is a three-and-a-half-acre parcel historically associated with the church and associated cemetery.

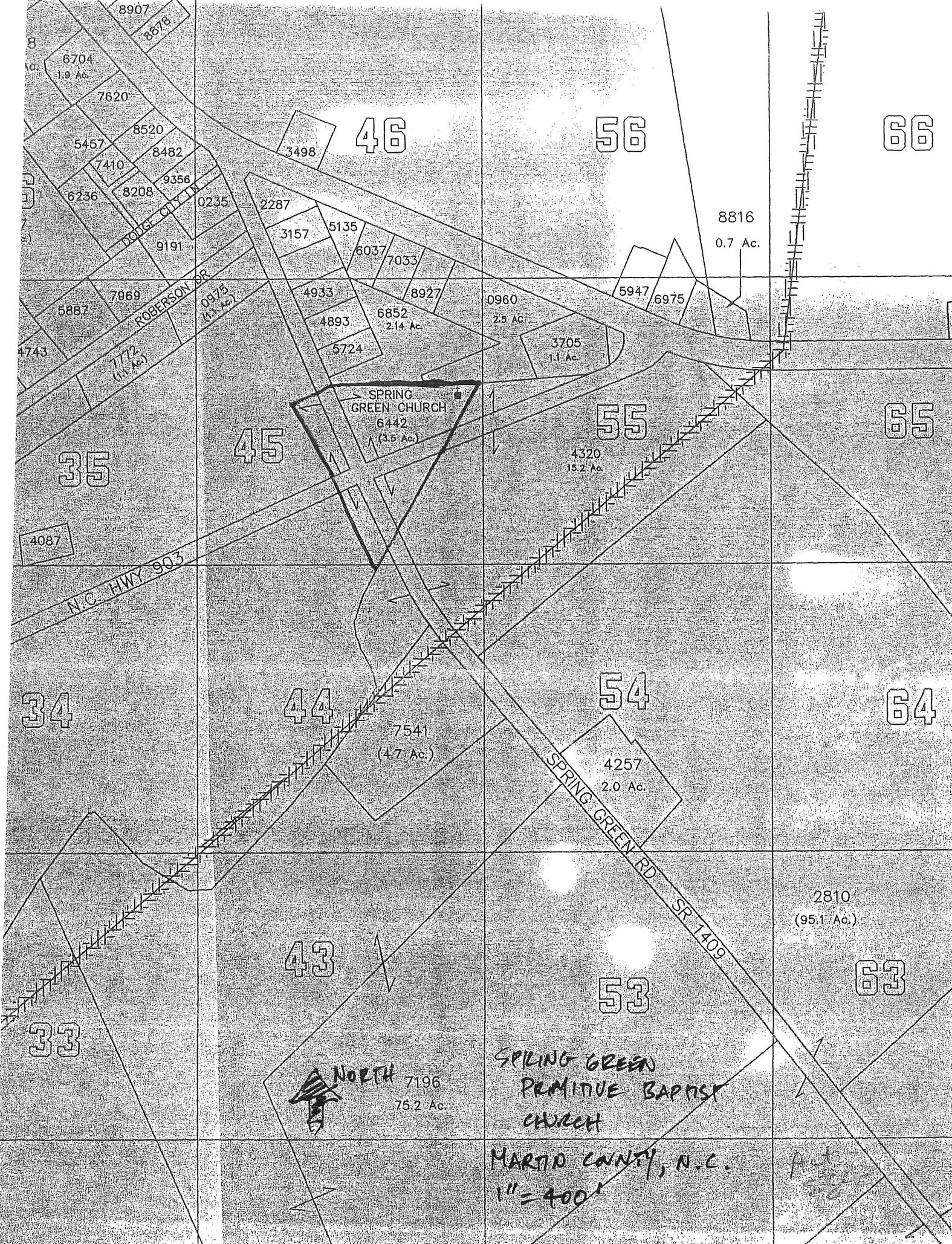
Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church, Martin County, North Carolina
Interior Floor Plan of Church (not to scale)



Spring Green Primitive Baptist Church, Martin County, North Carolina

Sketch Map of Property, Building, and Cemetery (NTS)





46

56

66

35

45

55

65

34

44

54

64

33

43

53

63



NORTH
7196
75.2 Ac.

SPRING GREEN
PRIMITIVE BAPTIST
CHURCH

MARTIN COUNTY, N.C.

1" = 400'

A

8907
8878
6704
1.9 Ac.
7620
8520
5457
8482
7410
9356
6236
8208
0235
9191
2287
3157
5135
6037
7033
4933
8927
6852
2.14 Ac.
0960
2.5 Ac.
5947
6975
8816
0.7 Ac.
5887
7969
ROBERSON SR
0975
(1.1 Ac.)
4743
7772
(1.1 Ac.)
4087
N.C. HWY 903

3498

2287

3157

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7033

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3705
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4320
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7541
(4.7 Ac.)

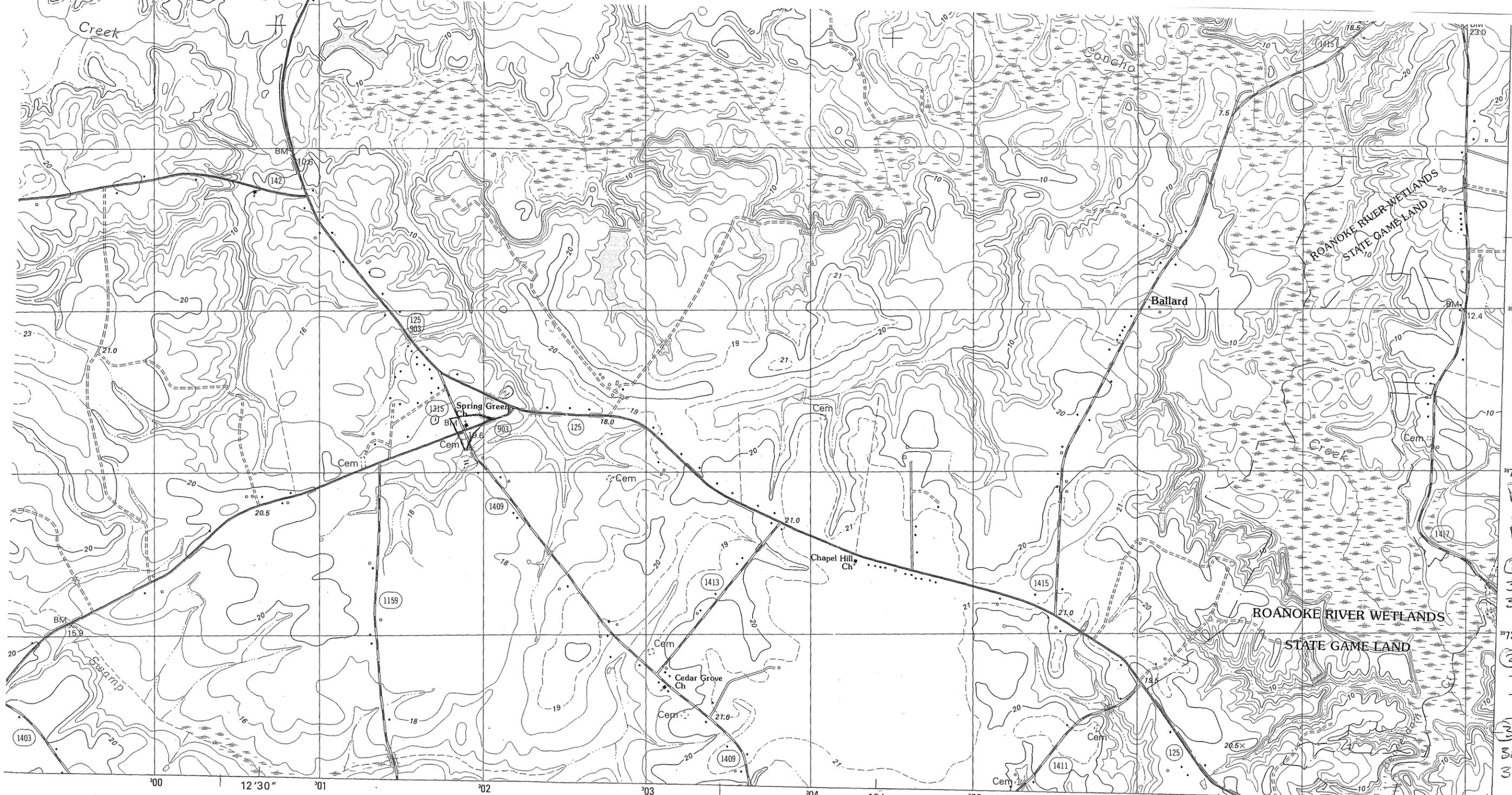
4257
2.0 Ac.

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DOUGL CITY

ROBERSON SR

SPRING GREEN RD
SR 1409



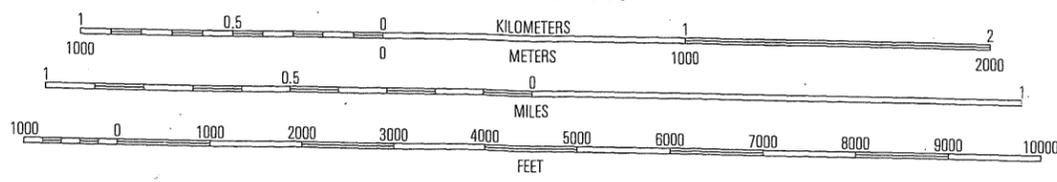
Spring Green
Primitive Baptist
Church
Martin Co, NC

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INTERIOR - GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA - 2002

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Primary highway hard surface
- Secondary highway hard surface
- Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
- Unimproved road

- Interstate Route
- U.S. Route
- State Route



1	2	3	1 Palmyra
			2 Lewiston Woodville
			3 Republican
4		5	4 Oak City
			5 Quitsna
			6 Robersonville West
6	7	8	7 Robersonville East
			8 Williamston

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLES

HAMILTON, NC
2002

NIMA 5555 I NW-SERIES V842

UTM GRID AND 2002 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

10°
178 MILS

1° 17'
23 MILS



CONTOUR INTERVAL 2 METERS
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DASHED SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOURS ARE APPROXIMATE
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
CONTROL ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.1 METER
OTHER ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.5 METER
TO CONVERT FROM METERS TO FEET, MULTIPLY BY 3.2808

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
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