

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Mt. Lebanon Chapel and Cemetery

and or common Lebanon Chapel

2. Location

street & number S. side SR 1411, 0.55 m. E. jct. with US 76; 0.2 m. from road  
not for publication

city, town Wrightsville Beach  vicinity of Airlie

state N.C. code 037 county New Hanover code 129

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Vestry of St. James Parish

street & number 25 South Third Street

city, town Wilmington  vicinity of state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New Hanover County Courthouse, Register of Deeds Office

street & number 314 Princess Street

city, town Wilmington state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

city, town Raleigh state N.C.

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## 7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in a clearing in Airlie Gardens, Mt. Lebanon Chapel is a restored, one-story, gable-roofed, rectangular building measuring 26' x 37', three bays wide by three bays deep, of weatherboarded frame construction, supported on brick piers. A flight of five wooden steps extends across the entire front elevation.

The principal, north, elevation consists of a central double door with four equal, square panels and applied moldings in each leaf, flanked by single wooden casement windows containing diamond quarrels set in lead cames. Pointed-arch transoms, also with diamond panes, surmount the windows and doors and are enframed by plain surrounds with square blocks at the springing of the arches. The transom over the entrance is contiguous with the double doors and the arch but is separated from the doors by its own sill and sheathing. The window frames and glass are 1908 replacements of earlier fabric. The wall is faced with wide, tongue-and-groove, flush siding, a treatment that is repeated in the pediment and in the corbelled belfry that rises through the ridge of the roof. The belfry features three, pointed-arch louvers in the front and side elevations. The roof, slightly flared at the eaves, is covered with riven, wooden shingles.

The east and west elevations, each containing three, pointed-arch openings with transoms above casement windows, are faced with nine-inch-to-the-weather, plain-edge siding. The rear elevation incorporates a square chancel with low, hipped roof projecting from the center bay and flanked by closely-set, pointed-arch windows. Two fine, stained glass windows, installed in the side walls of the chancel, were donated at the time of the restoration in 1974 by Mrs. Thomas H. Wright, Jr. and come from the chapel at Fairintosh Plantation near Durham, North Carolina.

The most striking feature of the exterior is the five-step cornice that extends around the entire building and is repeated in diminished size in the pediments and corbelling of the belfry.

The interior of Mt. Lebanon Chapel is austere in appearance, in keeping with its period of construction and use. Walls are smooth plaster. The original high, molded baseboards and simple cornices encompass the room. The beaded board ceiling, dating to a 1908 alteration, arches slightly at its junction with the walls. A rustic, iron chandelier of quatrefoil design is suspended from the ceiling by chains. This was installed in the chapel during the restoration to replace earlier oil lamps stolen from the building in the 1970s. The wide, tongue-and-groove pine flooring is in its original, natural finish and is hand dressed on the under side to fit uniformly over the hewn sills and floor joists in the main body of the structure. Eight rows of wooden pews, reproductions of the destroyed originals, flank the center aisle and abut the side walls; their only decorative distinction being chamfered caps on the pew ends. The raised chancel is enclosed by an altar rail consisting of tapered, octagonal posts, chamfered railings and square balusters. Original window and door frames are unadorned and lack the corner blocks found on the exterior. The altar table is a modern, 1974, replacement of one destroyed by vandals. The reading desk or pulpit, featuring three lancet panels at the front and two at the sides, is original to the chapel. The two stained glass windows, previously cited, are installed in the apsidal interior wall of the chancel and produce a Pre-Raphaelite chroma within the confines of the Sanctuary, and focus attention on the beauty and restraint of the interior.

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The cemetery, located about one hundred feet to the south of the chapel, contains ninety-one burials dating from 1815 (Sophia M. Gibbs), to 1964 (Victor D. Gurganus), thus pre-dating the erecting of the Chapel by a score of years. The grounds contain the remains of such notable Wilmington families as the Bradleys, Corbetts, Hills, Jewetts, Joneses, Sneedens, Spooners, Waterses, and Wrights.

Enclosed within a high, Flemish bond, brick wall and accessible through a pair of iron carriage gates, to the left of which is a single gate, the cemetery features several handsome metal markers and an assortment of cast-iron fence enclosures that are similar to designs found at Oakdale Cemetery, (1852-55), in Wilmington and those bordering residential properties in the downtown area.

## 8. Significance

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 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"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> invention		
<b>Specific dates</b>	1835	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Unknown	

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

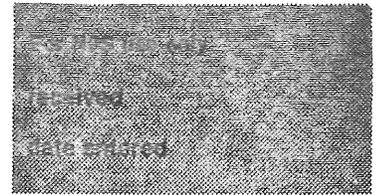
Mt. Lebanon Chapel, built in 1835, is significant both for its simple, robust, Greco-Gothic architectural style and for its historical association with the development of Greenville, Masonboro and Wrightsville Sound regions of New Hanover County. The chapel is the oldest known surviving religious structure in the county. <sup>1</sup>

### CRITERIA ASSESSMENT:

- A. The chapel is a simple but robust example of Greco-Gothic, vernacular architecture and is the oldest known surviving church structure in the county. The cemetery is associated with the chapel historically and is representative of nineteenth century cemeteries found in the region.

### CRITERIA EXCEPTIONS:

- A. Lebanon Chapel is the oldest known surviving church in New Hanover County, and is a fine example of the Greek Revival style from the antebellum period.
- C. The cemetery associated with Lebanon Chapel contains burials dating from 1815 to 1964, slightly pre-dating the chapel, but in continual use during the active years of the church. The cemetery is surrounded by a high Flemish bond brick wall with an assortment of stones and burial enclosure fences, making it a good representation of a nineteenth and twentieth century cemetery.

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In 1800 Joshua Grainger Wright, (1768-1811), Judge of Superior Court, member of the North Carolina General Assembly and first president of the Bank of Cape Fear, purchased large land holdings along Lee's --- later Bradley's --- Creek in Harnett Township and built a summer residence there which he called Mt. Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> His son, Dr. Thomas H. Wright, (1800-1861), erected Mt. Lebanon Chapel on a portion of the property and arranged for lay readers from St. James Church in Wilmington to conduct services there during the summer months.<sup>3</sup> The Episcopal Diocesan Convention of 1836 noted in its minutes that "a very neat and commodious chapel" had been erected in Wrightsville, eight miles from Wilmington.<sup>4</sup> The chapel was in continuous use for the next eighty-eight years until, in 1924 St. Andrew's-on-the-Sound was built at the intersection of the shell road and the beach railway line, 2/3 of a mile to the north-west of Mt. Lebanon Chapel.<sup>5</sup>

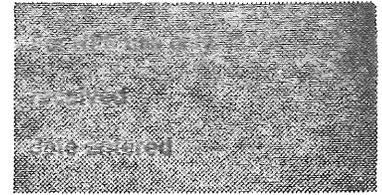
Prior to the opening of the shell road, officially designated as the Wilmington and Coast Turnpike, in 1876, linking Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach and the completion of the Wilmington and Sea Coast Railroad a decade later, the sound area had been a well established summer retreat for Wilmington's business and social elite.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century the property along the north side of Lee's Creek was held by the Grants, Gileses, Latimers, Bradleys, Wrights and others.<sup>7</sup> The Bradley-Latimer Summer House, (ca. 1855), just north of Mt. Lebanon Chapel, is a survivor of these early summer places nestled amid the trees above the marshlands and Mt. Lebanon Chapel remains the oldest known religious structure in the county.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Wright had intended to deed the chapel and six-and-a-half acres of ground, including the cemetery, to St. James Parish at the time of the building of the chapel in 1835 but the legal transfer of the property was not accomplished until 1875 when Marion Potter, a guardian of the Wright children, acknowledged this intent in a deed of transfer to the vestry of St. James.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, in May 1877, the vestry appointed a committee to maintain the chapel and grounds.<sup>10</sup> Despite the official transfer, protection and maintenance of the property often fell to the owner of the surrounding land and several attempts were made to close the chapel road as a means of protecting the grounds.<sup>11</sup> In 1906 Pembroke Jones, (1858-1919), president of the Cape Fear Rice Milling Company, the Sea Side Park Improvement Company, vice-president and director of the Carolina Shipbuilding Company and stockholder in the Atlantic Coast Line Rail Road Company, enclosed all the property between the shell road and Lee's Creek which he had purchased from the Wright and Bradley estates, excluding Mt. Lebanon Chapel, and named the place Airlie after his ancestors' homeplace in Scotland.<sup>12</sup> A letter from Jones to the wardens and vestry of St. James spells out his intent to close the property to the general public, despite considerable opposition from the churchmen and their attorneys.<sup>13</sup> Jones did, however, offer controlled access for those wanting to use the chapel. He wrote on March 20, 1906:

I propose placing a gate at the old entrance with a lock upon it. ... There will be a key attached to the lock at this gate so that any one who wishes can open the gate and enter. I intend also to erect steps over the fence so that any person can cross without trouble. ... It may cause some slight

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inconvenience to people who wish to drive to the Church, but that amounts simply to unlocking and opening the gate. ... [The present condition] allows any and all conditions of people to make free use of it. <sup>14</sup>

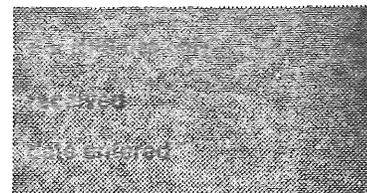
Two years later Pembroke Jones offered to take custodial charge of the chapel and grounds and carried out some necessary repairs to the structure. <sup>15</sup>

After Pembroke Jones's death in 1919, his widow married Henry Harry Walters, (1848-1931), reputed to be the largest stockholder in the Atlantic Coast Line Rail Road at that time. During the Walters's residency the famous Airlie Gardens were established, comprising some 155 acres of azaleas, wisterias and moss-draped oaks, with Mt. Lebanon chapel as a centerpiece. <sup>16</sup> In 1948 Airlie Gardens was purchased by W. Albert Corbett, Sr., (1891-1952), in whose family the estate remains.

In 1971 and 1972 vandals had reduced Mt. Lebanon Chapel to a state of disrepair and efforts were undertaken to restore the building to its former beauty. Under the auspices of the Right Reverend Thomas H. Wright, Bishop of the Diocese of East Carolina from 1945 to 1973, and a descendent of the original builder of the chapel, who is still active in its preservation and use; the Reverend Herbert L. Aman, Rector of St. Andrew's-on-the-Sound Episcopal Church; and the congregations of St. Andrew's and St. James; the restoration was completed and the chapel rededicated in April 1974. <sup>17</sup> Currently, the chapel is used for special services and has become especially popular for spring and summer weddings amid the grandeur of the azalea gardens. <sup>18</sup>

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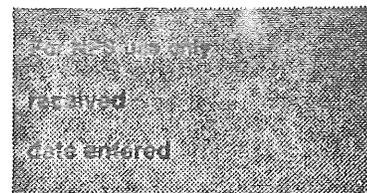
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FOOTNOTES:

1. Drane, Reverend Robert Brent, D.D., Sketch of St. James Parish, Wilmington, N.C. (New York, E.J. Hale & Son, 1874)
2. Hicks, Eugene C., compiler, Sir Ellis Hicks (1315), Captain John Ward (1598), John Wright (1500), Philip de Yonge (1295) and 7,812 Descendents. (Wilmington, N.C., 1982)
3. Drane, op.cit., St. James Church, established in 1729, was rebuilt in 1839-40 at the southeast corner of Third and Market Streets in Wilmington. Designed by architect Thomas U. Walter, (1804-1887), a leader of the Greek Revival style in America but an admirer of the "purer and more artistic forms of medieval art", (Burchard, John and Albert Bush-Brown, The Architecture of America, Boston; Little, Brown & Co., 1961, 1966), St. James Church has been called "the first great Gothic Revival church in North America", (Lane, Mills, Architecture of the Old South: North Carolina, Savannah, Georgia; The Beehive Press, 1985).
4. Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of North Carolina (1836).
5. McEachern, Leora Hiatt and Bill Reaves, History of St. James Parish, 1729-1979. (Wilmington, N.C., 1985); Norden, Eric, C.E., Map of the Salt Marshes of Wrightsville Sound. (Wilmington, N.C. November 1923).
6. Hall, Louis Philip, Land of the Golden River, Volume 1: Old Times on the Seacoast, 1526-1970. (Wilmington, N.C., 1975).
7. McKoy, Elizabeth F., Early New Hanover County Records. (Wilmington, N.C., 1973).
8. Drane, op.cit.; McEachern and Reaves, op.cit.
9. New Hanover County Register of Deeds Office, Wilmington, N.C., Book MMM, p. 267.
10. Minutes of the Vestry of St. James Parish, Wilmington, N.C., Various dates.
11. Waddell, Alfred Moore, Letters in the church files in St. James Parish House, Wilmington, N.C.
12. Hall, op.cit.; Mohn, Celia, Wrightsville Beach, Nature's Nightmare or Sunny Sanctuary?, (History Honors Thesis, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, April 16, 1984), North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library, 201 Chestnut Street, Wilmington, N.C.
13. Waddell, op.cit.

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14. Jones, Pembroke, Letter to the Wardens and Vestry of St. James Parish, Wilmington, N.C., dated March 20, 1906. Church files, St. James Parish House, Wilmington, N.C.
15. Minutes, op.cit.
16. Cashman, Diane Cobb, Cape Fear Adventure: An Illustrated History of Wilmington, North Carolina. (Woodland Hills, California, Windsor Publications, 1982); Russell, Ann, PhD., A Pictorial History of Wilmington. (Norfolk, Virginia, Donning Publishing Co., 1981).  
Mrs. Sarah G. Jones, widow of Pembroke Jones, offered to purchase Mt. Lebanon Chapel and grounds in 1920 from St. James Parish, the money to be used to build a new church near Wrightsville. The purchase was not effected but a new church, St. Andrew's-on-the-Sound, was erected at the intersection of Oleander Drive and Airlie Road in 1924. Q.v. McEachern and Reaves, op.cit.
17. Wilmington Star-News newspapers, March 3, 1973 and April 27, 1974.
18. Discussion with Right Reverend Thomas H. Wright, D.D., (Retired), November 1985.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Drane, Rev. Robert Brent, D.D, Sketch of St. James Parish, Wilmington, N.C. New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1874.

McEachern, Leora H. and Bill Reaves. History of St. James Parish, 1729-1979 Wilmington, 1985  
New Hanover County Deeds, Book MMM.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 6.5 acres

Quadrangle name Wrightsville Beach

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	8	2	3	9	6	0	0	3	7	8	9	3	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The lot has been historically associated with the church since the chapel was constructed in 1835. A plat map is enclosed with the boundaries outlined in red.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward F. Turberg, Restoration Consultant

organization Contractor for New Hanover County date June 2, 1986

street & number 307 North 15th Street telephone (919) 762-6301

city or town Wilmington state North Carolina 28401

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature William S. King, Jr.

title State Historic Preservation Officer date July 10, 1986

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

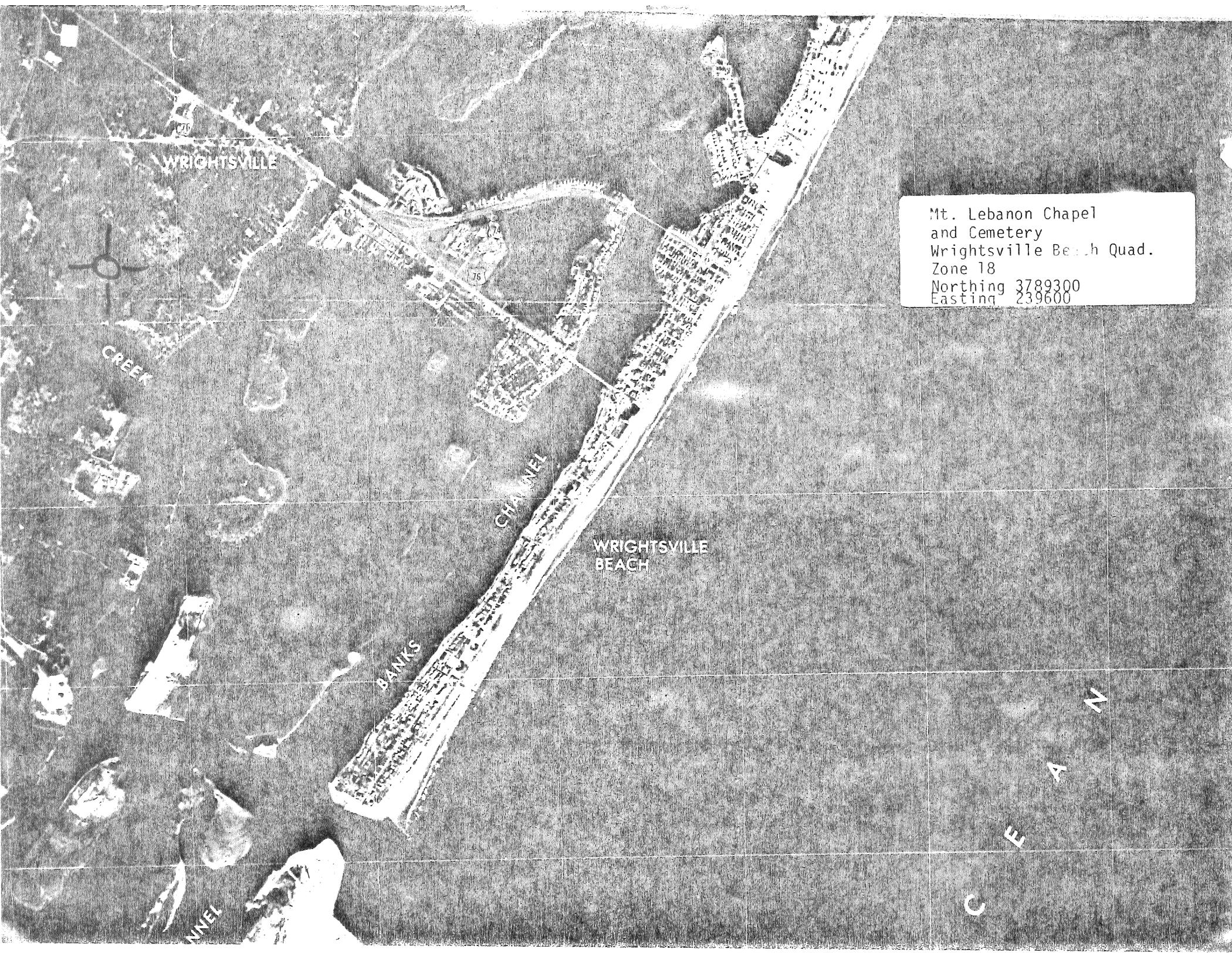
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



WRIGHTSVILLE



CREEK

76

CHANNEL

WRIGHTSVILLE  
BEACH

BANKS

WINE

Mt. Lebanon Chapel  
and Cemetery  
Wrightsville Beach Quad.  
Zone 18  
Northing 3789300  
Easting 239600

C  
E  
A  
N

