United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

1. Name

historic Summerville Presbyterian Church and Cemetery

and/or common

2. Location

street & number South side of SR 1291, 0.65 mi. West of jct. with SR 1229

not for publication

city, town Lillington

XX vicinity of

state North Carolina
code 037
county Harnett
code 085

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<td>occupied</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
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<td>unoccupied</td>
<td>commercial</td>
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<tr>
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<td>both</td>
<td>work in progress</td>
<td>educational</td>
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<td>Accessible</td>
<td>entertainment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>industrial</td>
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</table>

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. Neil Ross, Clerk of Session, Summerville Presbyterian Church

street & number P. O. Box 186

city, town Lillington

XX vicinity of

state N. C. 27546

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds

street & number Harnett County Courthouse

city, town Lillington

state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date

federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town

state
Summerville Presbyterian Church and its adjacent cemetery stand on a flat site which is slightly elevated above much of the surrounding rural landscape of western Harnett County in the sandhills region of North Carolina. The simple, rectangular frame structure, erected in the mid-nineteenth century, is the oldest church building in the county, and its cemetery contains a fine collection of mid to late nineteenth century grave markers, some of which are signed by George Lauder of Fayetteville, a Scots stonemason who worked on the state capitol building. The backdrop of mature pine trees, cedars, and magnolias combine with crepe myrtles and other flowering shrubs to create a picturesque setting in keeping with the rural character of the church.

Although unchanged in form, mass and basic materials from its original antebellum construction phase (ca. 1848), the church owes many of the distinguishing features of its current appearance to alterations apparently made in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. In its earliest form, Summerville Presbyterian Church (under its original name of Tirzah) probably exemplified the simple Greek Revival style so popular for rural churches in North Carolina throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century. Alterations believed to have been made following the Civil War—in the 1870s—lend a Gothic Revival flair to the building's exterior.

The rectangular frame structure rests on a common bond brick foundation, although it is probable that it first stood on brick piers. Each elevation consists of three bays—windows mark each bay of the longer side elevations, while windows flank entrances on the narrower facade and rear elevation. The original exterior siding of plain weatherboards survives in excellent condition, meeting at classical corner boards and rising from a high sill board to a wide cornice and soffit. A front gable roof with a box cornice and wide returns covers the structure; a number of the original wood shingles survive beneath the present composition shingle roof. Tall, lancet arch windows, whose present form likely dates from the post-Civil War embellishments, rest on deep wood sills and have simple, two-part surrounds with a pronounced bead. This form repeats around the centrally placed front entrance which consists of double leaf doors of six raised panels each, set beneath a four-panel, pointed arch solid wood transom. A lancet arch, louvered vent is located under the peak of the gable; slightly larger vents of identical form are repeated on each of the four sides of the square steeple, which also was added in the 1870s. A tent roof with flared eaves covers the steeple and is capped by a simple pinnacle.

The relatively simple church interior is a mix of original, post-Civil War, early twentieth century, and mid twentieth century elements, with the first two periods dominant. The principal surviving original feature is the gallery which is supported by chamfered posts. Reached by an enclosed stair in the northeast corner of the building, the gallery has simple boxed seats with tapered backs running its entire width, fronted by a flat-paneled apron with a spindle railing. The area below the gallery was enclosed in 1948 (when the church was put back into use after being closed for 19 years) and divided into classrooms and an entrance hall by glass and wooden partitions. Five-panel doors lead to the sanctuary from the hall and each of the two class rooms.

The sanctuary itself is an uninterrupted space whose original pulpit and altar furniture stand on a raised platform projecting from a three-sided recess. The simple wooden pews date from the 1870s renovations. Five-panel doors open from the chancel wall into two small rooms flanking a rear hall which leads to the outside. The interior
trim is simple in design, typified by two-part window and door surrounds and flat, two-part baseboards with a beaded top. Triple sash windows consist of six panes in the lower, three in the middle, and nine in the upper sash. The six tapering panes in the arch are of colored glass. The plaster walls curve upward from the top of the windows to a flat tongue-and-groove ceiling from which two handsome gas lanterns and two ceiling fans are suspended.

Behind the church is a fellowship hall built in the early 1950s after the church's official reorganization. The one-story rectangular structure is set perpendicular to the church building and joined to it by a covered walkway. Clad in German or novelty siding and resting on a cinder block foundation, the gable-roofed hall contains a large meeting room, three class rooms, a kitchen, and rest room facilities. Its interior has a simple paneled board finish and linoleum tile floor.

The cemetery, which comprises more than two-thirds of the acreage associated with the church, is laid out in a grid pattern of approximately one hundred fifty plots lying to the west and northwest of the church and divided by pedestrian walks and vehicular drives. Although many tombstones are typical twentieth century polished granite, marble and cast concrete markers, there is a fine collection of mid and late nineteenth century markers, including simple tablets, obelisks, and several table markers. About twenty are signed by (George) Lauder, a Scots stonemason who was employed in the rebuilding of the North Carolina State Capitol building and later operated a stone and marble yard in Fayetteville, where he produced a great number of tombstones seen in cemeteries throughout central North Carolina.

Among the most unusual markers is the rough-hewn stone recording the birth and death of Colonel A. S. McNeill (1805-1876) and the table marker indicating the final resting place of an unknown man—"The Home of the Stranger." Many of Lauder's stones are embellished with a variety of decorative motifs, including floral symbols and arches reminiscent of Gothic Revival window and door openings. In addition to their craftsmanship, these early grave markers, as well as those of later generations, clearly attest to the ethnic origins of much of the local population, with stones recording the lives of members of families with names such as McKay, Cameron, McLean, McLeod, and McNeill. Among the more impressive is that of Reverend Neill McKay, minister of Summerville Presbyterian Church for fifty years and a prominent member of the local community.
Summerville Presbyterian Church, established in 1811 as Tirzah Church, is a fine example of a mid-nineteenth century rural church with later nineteenth century alterations which has survived relatively intact into the last years of the twentieth century. It is significant both as the oldest church building surviving in Harnett County and as a reminder of the Highland Scots settlement of the sandhills region of North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, it is associated with the Reverend Neill McKay, its minister for fifty years, who was prominent in the region as a Presbyterian minister, church historian, trustee of the University of North Carolina, and substantial land- and slaveowner. Architecturally, Summerville is a handsome representative of the antebellum Greek Revival frame church of the state's rural areas, updated after the Civil War with Gothic Revival accents and a charming steeple. Its beautifully landscaped and well-maintained cemetery contains a fine collection of mid and late nineteenth century grave markers, some twenty of which were signed by the master craftsman, George Lauder, a Scots stonemason employed in the rebuilding of the North Carolina State Capitol building. The tombstones also chronicle the ethnic origins of the church's membership, recording the names of McKay, Cameron, McLean, McLeod, and McNeill, among others.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. Is associated with the settlement by Highland Scots immigrants of the sandhills region of North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries;

B. Is associated with the life of Reverend Neill McKay, its most illustrious minister;

C. The church building exemplifies the simple rural church of the mid 19th century with later embellishments; its cemetery contains numerous handsome tombstones, including a large group by George Lauder, a master stonemason.
Summerville Presbyterian Church, formerly known as Tirzah Church, is located west of Lillington in Harnett County. The church was organized in 1811. The present building, a simple frame structure, was erected around 1848 and is the oldest church building in the county. Some alterations were made to the exterior in the late nineteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century some interior changes were made and a separate education building was constructed behind the antebellum structure. The church's cemetery has a wide variety of notable tombstones, many of them crafted by George Lauder of Fayetteville. Among those buried there is Neill McKay (1816–1893), a figure of singular importance to the church in the nineteenth century. McKay was a Presbyterian minister, church historian and University of North Carolina trustee, as well as being the county's largest slaveholder. His home, known as "Summer Villa," is located one-half mile from the church.

The area now encompassed by Harnett County was in large part settled by Highland Scots in the mid-eighteenth century. Barbecue Church was established by the Presbyterian Scots in 1758. Tirzah was the first of Barbecue's several daughter churches. Organized in 1811, the Tirzah congregation worshipped for almost forty years in a log building, built by slave labor and located about 175 feet east of the present structure. Initially they shared their minister, Allen McDougald, with Barbecue. Their first ruling elders, also drawn from Barbecue, were Daniel McLean and Neill McKay, father of the man who would later in the century lead the congregation.  

Harnett County was formed from Cumberland County in 1855. The law creating the county directed that court sessions be held in Summerville (also known for a time as Toomer) until a permanent county seat could be chosen. The first such session met on March 11, 1855, at Cumberland Academy in Summerville. The name for the community was apparently the contribution of Simeon Colton, teacher at the academy, whose ancestral home in Massachusetts was known as Summerville. Chosen as county solicitor at the 1855 meeting was Neill McKay, nephew of the Reverend Neill McKay. The younger McKay also represented Harnett in the state legislature in 1864 and 1865.

Objections to the choice of Summerville as county seat were heard almost immediately. Landowners refused to sell. Thus in 1859 an election was held by direction from the legislature to choose a permanent seat. The first court session was held at the new site, the town of Lillington, a few miles east of Summerville, in October 1859. However since there were as yet no adequate facilities in Lillington, court sessions were again held in Summerville from 1860 to 1867. The courthouse completed at Lillington in 1867 burned in 1892 thereby destroying the greater part of Harnett's early records.

Thus Lillington became the center of political activity and Summerville faded into relative obscurity. Yet, in the 1840s, it had seemed that Summerville would become a population and education center of some size and importance. At one time there were as many as three academies operating in the community. Simeon Colton, headmaster of one of the schools, wrote in 1844 to the Reverend Neill McKay's brother, Doctor John McKay, "Mr. [Neill] McKay has agreed to take charge of the college to be built at Tirza Church." Colton added, "You will soon have a city, a college, and no one knows how many other fine things about Tirza Church." A number of homes were built in the area. As late as 1890 some fourteen or fifteen large antebellum residences remained in Summerville. Yet by 1940 all but two of these had disappeared. Among the ones remaining was "Summer Villa," begun by the Reverend McKay in 1849.
The land for the new church building was acquired in two parcels, the first in 1843 and the second in 1846. In the first transaction John McNeill, Alexander Morison, and Alexander McLean, elders of Tirzah Church, bought from John Atkins nine acres "embracing the spot on which the church is located." The land had been in the Atkins family since it had been patented in 1796. The second transaction involved two acres which Alexander Murchison sold to trustees for the church. The present building is believed to have been built shortly thereafter, probably around 1848. All of this activity took place in the early years of Neill McKay's pastorate.

Neill McKay (11 February 1816 – 28 February 1893) was a fourth-generation Highland Scot. He was raised at "Flint Hill" on the upper Cape Fear River, one of eight children born to Neill and Flora McKay. The elder Neill McKay died in 1830 at age sixty-four. His estate, 1,200 acres and twelve adult slaves, was divided between his two oldest sons, Murdoch and Malcolm. Flora (McNeill) McKay died in 1868 at age eighty-two. Both she and her husband are buried in Summerville Presbyterian Church's cemetery.

The younger Neill McKay began his education in Fayetteville at Donaldson Academy, one of several institutions administered by Simeon Colton. From there he went first to Princeton University and then to the University of North Carolina; however, he did not graduate from either institution. One account has it that he was dismissed from one or both of the schools for fighting. The fights are said to have resulted from his outspoken defense of states' rights. In 1841 McKay completed his studies at Columbia (S.C) Theological Seminary. In that same year he was licensed and ordained by the Fayetteville Presbyterian, which he would serve for over fifty years. McKay ministered to large parts of Chatham, Moore, and Cumberland counties as well as Harnett County. Although his longest tenure was at Tirzah he also was pastor at Buffalo, Flat Branch, Salem, and other churches in the area.

Neill McKay was married three times. Sarah Adaline James (1822-1861), daughter of a South Carolina minister, was McKay's first wife and the mother of his daughters Cornelia and Louise. Annie B. Shepard Pettigrew (1830-1864), daughter of Ebenezer Pettigrew of Tyrrell County, was his second. His third wife was the former Margaret Murchison (1839-1924) of nearby Manchester. They were married on December 10, 1873. McKay's final child, a daughter named Fannie, was born in 1880 when he was sixty-four. The first and third wives are buried at Summerville. The former Miss Pettigrew is interred at Bonarva plantation in Tyrrell County.

The Reverend McKay was highly respected and much praised for his work as a minister and church historian. He had a long association with the North Carolina Presbyterian, established in Fayetteville in 1858, and "often enrich[ed] its columns with the product of his vigorous pen." On October 18, 1858, McKay delivered the "Centenary Sermon" before the Fayetteville Presbyterian at Bluff Church in Cumberland County. The sermon commemorates the date that James Campbell has first been called to preach in the area. It was published and used as a source by later historians of the Presbyterian Church. He served the church in several capacities. In 1862 he was appointed its agent of education and proposed that each presbytery appoint three men to collect and disburse funds for the schooling of fallen soldiers' children.

The University of North Carolina awarded Neill McKay a Doctor of Divinity degree in 1869. He was made an honorary member of the North Carolina Historical Society in
1870. In 1868 and from 1874 to 1893 he served as a trustee of the university. Conspicuous acts of service to the school include his work to reopen the university in 1875 and his advocacy of state aid in 1881. By one account his name was prominently mentioned for the presidency of the university, said to be "a proposition which he positively declined to entertain."

As he grew older McKay became increasingly feeble and, in 1891 at age seventy-five, he wrote a farewell letter to the presbytery. He died on February 28, 1893. Estimations of his character were generally kind though not untingling in their praise. The North Carolina Presbyterian observed that McKay was

... a man of very decided convictions [who] never feared to express them. If at times he was severe in his expressions he was not unkind; he bore no malice and gave full allowance to difference of opinion. He was a man of very strong common sense and his judgment was at all times worthy of respect.

McKay left his property to his wife Margaret who died in 1924. She in turn left the estate to her daughter Fannie and to several grandchildren. In her will she expressed the opinion that the estate if "properly worked and managed... will furnish a good support for her and her family and that the remainder will give my grandchildren a little start in life." Fannie Reid McKay married Charles Ross, a merchant and lawyer, in 1907. Mrs. Ross died in 1977. Today their son Neill McKay Ross, born in 1909 and like his father a lawyer, is the owner of "Summer Villa" and Clerk of Session at Summerville Presbyterian Church.

Several changes, including the addition of a steeple, were made to the church building in the late nineteenth century. In 1890 the church, with McKay at its helm, was still known as Tirzah. However within a few years it had taken the name of its surrounding community, Summerville. In 1929 the church was dissolved by the Fayetteville Presbytery. The congregation, many of whose members were drawn to newly formed churches in Lillington and elsewhere, had become quite small. However, through the efforts of the people of the community the building was kept in repair. The church reopened on April 18, 1948, when a Sunday school was formed. On March 18, 1951, the church was formally reorganized with fifty charter members. In 1954 the steeple was slightly damaged by Hurricane Hazel. A separate education building was constructed behind the main building a few years later. In most other respects the physical plant of Summerville Presbyterian Church is much like it was in the 1840s.

One of the most striking aspects of the church's grounds is the unusual variety of grave markers. Many of these are the work of George Lauder, a native of Scotland who operated a marble yard in Fayetteville. Lauder, who did some of the stone work on the State Capitol in the 1830s, was also for a period Fayetteville's postmaster. The most unusual stone in the cemetery is one placed there some years ago by Fannie Reid Ross. The stone is headed "Home of the Stranger" and marks the grave of a stranger found dead by the roadside by Neill and John McKay. The traveler had no identification and no one claimed his body. The members of the church interred his body and marked his grave as an act of Christian charity.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet  HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE  Item number 8

NOTES

1. Malcolm Fowler, They Passed This Way: A Personal Narrative of Harnett County History (Lillington: Harnett County Bicentennial, Inc., 1955), 102; Tirzah Church Sessional Minutes, 1811-1812, cited in Summerville Presbyterian Church program, 13 October 1968. Fowler lists twenty-one other original members of Tirzah Church.


3. Interview with Neill McKay Ross (by telephone), 28 June 1984.


7. Cumberland County Deed Book 46, pp. 218 and 376.

8. Cumberland County Deed Book 40, p. 414. Flora McKay was described as "a woman of deep piety, strong common sense, great generosity, coupled with very uncommon energy and executive ability . . .[who] looked well to the ways of her house." North Carolina Presbyterian (Fayetteville), 30 March 1893.

9. Daniel L. Grant (comp.), Alumni History of the University of North Carolina, 2nd edition (Chapel Hill: General Alumni Association, 1924), 394; E. C. Scott (comp.), Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, United States, 1861-1941 (Austin, Texas: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1942), 471. The account of McKay's fighting is taken from an unpublished sketch of the minister written in the 1940s by Harnett County historian Arthur T. Wyatt. Wyatt Collection, North Carolina State Archives.

10. Family information is taken from census records and tombstones at Summerville Presbyterian Church.


12. Neill McKay, "Centenary Sermon Delivered Before the Presbytery of Fayetteville, at the Bluff Church, the 18th Day of October, 1858" (Fayetteville: Presbyterian Office, 1858); Jethro Rumpole, The History of Presbyterianism in North Carolina, reprinted from the North Carolina Presbyterian, 1878-1887 (Richmond: Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1966), 28 ff.


North Carolina Presbyterian, 30 March 1893.

North Carolina Presbyterian, 9 March 1893. Arthur T. Wyatt had a different opinion of McKay, believing him to be "a very pugnacious, hardboiled man who never should have been in the ministry." Wyatt Collection, North Carolina State Archives.


Fowler, *They Passed This Way*, 103; Summerville Presbyterian Church program, 13 October 1968.


Summerville Presbyterian Church program, 8 November 1970.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx. 7.87 acres

Quadrangle name Lillington

UTM References

| A | 1 1 7 | 1 6 1 9 4 | 7 1 6 6 0 | 3 1 9 1 1 9 6 1 5 |
| B |      |         |          |           |
| C |      |         |          |           |
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| F |      |         |          |           |
| G |      |         |          |           |
| H |      |         |          |           |

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

The property being nominated is outlined in red on the attached plat map and consists of the church and fellowship hall, their grounds, and the associated cemetery.

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

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11. Form Prepared By

Significance - Michael Hill, Researcher;
name/title Description - Allison Harris Black, Survey Specialist

organization N. C. Division of Archives and History date December 2, 1984

street & number 109 East Jones Street telephone 919 733-6545

city or town Raleigh state North Carolina 27611

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

title State Historic Preservation Officer date January 11, 1985

For NPS use only

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

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:
date

Chief of Registration
BIBLIOGRAPHY


8. Fayetteville Gazette, 1 March 1893.


Scott, E. C., comp. *Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, United States, 1861-1941.* Austin, Texas: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1942.


Summerville Presbyterian Church. Programs, 13 October 1968 and 8 November 1970.

Tirzah Church. *Sessional Minutes.* 1811-1812.

