

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Brinkleyville vicinity, Halifax County, HX0215, Listed 8/28/2012

Nomination by Drucilla H. York

Photographs by Drucilla H. York, February 2011



Overall view



Rear view

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

Historic name Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Other names/site number Bethesda Methodist Church

2. Location

street & number 30974 NC Highway 561 N/A not for publication

city of town Brinkleyville X vicinity

State North Carolina code NC county Halifax code 083 zip code 27850

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
Title State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal
- private

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- building(s)
- object

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)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

VACANT / NOT IN USE

FUNERARY: cemetery

FUNERARY: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

foundation: BRICK

STUCCO

walls: WOOD: Weatherboard

roof: METAL: Tin

other: _____

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Situated on one acre of land, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church and its cemetery is located on the eastern fringes of Brinkleyville, a rural village and former mid-nineteenth-century education center nestled within the rolling hills of Halifax County's western piedmont. Facing south, the church is situated on the north side of NC 561 approximately 0.74 mile east of the village center at the intersection of NC 48 and NC 561. Surrounded by plantation pines, this rectilinear piece of property is wooded with mature pines, white oaks, and cedars. From the front property line to the back, its elevation gently rises a little more than ten feet, and the cemetery is positioned behind the church.

The Greek Revival-style frame church is set back from the road approximately fifty feet, and a semi-circular drive curves in front of it. Large rocks once lined the inner curve of this drive but only remnants remain. Tall pines stand within its curved wooded island and shade a centrally located ca. 1939 metal church sign. Weathered with age and dating from the Methodist unification in 1939, this free-standing double-faced sign stands on a post, has a strap metal frame with a delicate curvilinear header, and features a plain flat surface upon which the church name and service information are written.

An additional less traveled path encircles the church and leads to the cemetery located approximately ninety feet behind the church. A mid-twentieth-century chain link fence frames this rectilinear cemetery. Woods surround this cemetery to the west, north, and east.

Narrative Description

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, 1853, ca. 1870-1889, contributing building

Following within a vernacular building tradition of gable-front frame churches typically built in rural North Carolina during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church embodies on the exterior the Greek Revival style with pedimented gable, paired entrances, and boxed cornices. Its interior organization, however, reflects modifications made ca. 1870 and 1889 when, respectively, the chancel orientation was reversed requiring the removal of the slave partition and the original rectilinear plan was expanded to include a small polygonal apse behind the chancel.

Built of heavy-timber mortise-and-tenon construction, the structure measures approximately thirty feet by forty feet and rests on a stone pier foundation that was stuccoed and then scored to resemble stone blocks. Evidence of this treatment remains but the space between each pier was infilled ca. 1930 using brick with a cement overlay. Plain weatherboards sheathe the exterior walls, and a return bead defines the cornerboards. Weatherboard also sheathes the face of the façade's pedimented gable and the rear flush gable. Standing-seam tin protects the gable roof. The roof's boxed cornice has mitred corner joints, a quarter-round bed molding, and remnants of a cyma recta cap. Plain boards serve as a frieze beneath the cornice and the rake along the rear gable. All door and window surrounds are simple with each having an inner bead and mitred joints. The sills and thresholds are also plain with canted surfaces to shed water. Greek Revival in style, each door has two recessed tall vertical flat panels outlined by a distinctive heavy molding.

Today, the exterior reflects three periods of change. However, the overall Greek Revival-style character of the church remains intact. Contemporary with the 1889 addition of a shed-roof polygonal apse, the sashes in the original large window bays were modified from twelve-over-twelve lights to six-over-six.ⁱ The apse addition also prompted the removal of two rear-façade windows and possibly a slave entry. Whether or not the central window at the front façade was removed at this time or earlier following the Civil War is uncertain. During the 1930s, a beautification project by the local home demonstration club enclosed the pier foundation and built the present porch with a gable-front hood above each entrance supported by diagonal brackets. This open deck features a stair in line with each entrance. A railing with square-in-section balusters outlines the deck and flanks each stair. Formerly, steps with an enclosed balustrade led directly to each

ⁱ "Bethesda Church, Halifax ct.," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

entrance. In the 1990s, tall paired louvered shutters protecting each window were removed; however, several originals survive.

Interior features, namely the walls, floors, and woodwork, evoke the church's 1853 construction while both the floor plan and furnishings convey an 1889 remodeling. The walls are plaster. The floor boards are heart pine with an average width of seven inches and running length of approximately nineteen feet seven inches. These boards are not randomly laid but extend the length of the church with two runs meeting at a common center line. The baseboards are hand-planed eleven-inch boards with a three-quarter inch top bead. Both the door and window surrounds feature an inner bead and a back band with typical splayed molding profile. Each surround measures four-and-a-half inches. Hand-planed two-panel doors hang from the original butt hinges. The door knobs and locks are modern replacements.

The floor plan is distinguished by a nave with eight ranges of pews, a raised chancel enclosed by a turned and curving balustrade, and an elliptical-arch opening into a small recessed apse. Arranged in two rows, sixteen pews create a center aisle as well as narrow side aisles. Each pew features decorative sawnwork ends distinguished by an outline illustrating a flame header, rounded arm, and cutwork feet. Using square headed nails, probably machine cut, these ends are joined to the three other elements of the pew: the seat, back, and underneath seat support rail. Reflecting the attachment of each, the nailing pattern structurally marks each pew end. The pew ends, seat, and backrest are made from single boards that are one-and-a-quarter inch thick. Rounded edges define the seat and back rest; however, the backrest has a plain applied cap rail. A book rack with horizontal slats is screwed midway at the back of most pews. Presently, there are seventeen long pews and five short ones, respectively measuring in length approximately ten feet nine inches and six feet two inches. At one time, the shorter pews may have flanked the chancel.

Fully elaborated turned woodwork defines the raised chancel and provides a link to local craftsmen influenced by regional master builders, Jacob W. Holt and Albert Gamaliel Jones from nearby Warren County. Raised on a single step, this chancel forms an elliptical projection into the nave that is mirrored by the communion railing. Its balustrade features a rounded handrail, turned balusters, and two turned newels. The handrail has a broad beveled-edge surface. Probably an early twentieth-century addition, a shallow wooden tray for communion ware lines the inner side of this rail. Within the chancel, another step creates a second similar-in-form level, a preaching area that includes a freestanding pulpit and a recessed apse. Centrally placed at this area's front edge stands a massive three-sided rectilinear pulpit that has an open back, a square base, a central pedestal, and a flat top with scalloped sides and a molded edge. Three sides of the pedestal feature robust turned decorative elements at each corner: a free-standing column supporting an oversized bracket with a single drop pendant. Resting on top of the pulpit is a smaller portable slant top desk.

Behind the pulpit, a three-centered arch opens into the apse and exhibits corner pilasters with hand-planed marks and a splayed backband and capital molding. The sides of this apse are also splayed and the ceiling coved. At the rear, three windows with plain board surrounds contain stained-glass that was installed in 1927 in memory of Nathaniel Mason Harrison (1854-1927). This triple grouping has a larger central window distinguished by a pointed arch. The stained glass of the central window features a shield with an open bible, and the shields in the flanking windows illustrate a crowned cross and a chalice with grapes and wheat. Early twentieth-century chairs, two side chairs and a central one with arms, stand beneath each window. Each has graceful legs and a back rail with pressed-design.

Three layers of historic carpet protect the aisles and chancel. Two are flat-woven late nineteenth-century examples, possibly hand-loomed. The red and gold combination has a Rococo-style floral design, and the green and beige sample has a geometric pattern. Both are found in the chancel with the red serving as an underlayment for the green. The more modern third example is a two-toned red with a fern spray design. This covers and protects the two earlier carpets in the chancel. It also overlays the earlier green example that covers each aisle and the open area around the chancel. Beneath the two rows of pews, the floors are painted brown.

A small storage closet constructed in the southwest corner of the interior is the only intrusion added after the period of significance. Built ca. 1950 with minimal framing, this corner closet has one entrance, a dry wall exterior, and open ceiling. Its walls rise only a portion of the height of the interior.

Cemetery, ca. 1885, contributing site

Located approximately ninety feet directly behind the church, this rectilinear cemetery enclosed by a chain-link fence is placed off-center to the east side of the property. Members of the Wills, Harrison, Vinson, Taylor, and Norman families and former parishioners are buried here. The cemetery contains sixty-eight burials many of which are arranged in family plots. Granite and concrete blocks outline some of these plots with each having low-profile walls. The concrete ones

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

typically have raised corners. A prime example is the Harrison plot with its poured concrete outline and centrally-placed tall granite family marker. Most tombstones are granite tablets. The monument of William Henry Wills, however, is a modest obelisk. Only one monument is identified by a maker's mark that of William Elliott Norman by Coopers of Raleigh.ⁱⁱ Two heavily weathered and rare wooden markers survive representing a common eighteenth- and nineteenth-century form of marking graves. Also, given the combination of more modern tombstones and late nineteenth-century dates, some families may have moved remains to the Bethesda cemetery from family cemeteries elsewhere or replaced earlier markers.

Integrity Statement

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church possesses historic integrity in terms of its location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The church property being nominated evolved through the addition in the late nineteenth century of a cemetery behind the church. This cemetery area has increased over time and is currently defined within a twentieth-century chain link fence. The property's primary resource, the church has remained remarkably unaltered and well preserved. Known changes outside the period of significance include several minor modifications made during the 1930s, namely the addition of brick infill between the original foundation piers, a front porch deck, and bracketed gable-front hoods above each entrance. A free-standing metal sign was installed at the site ca. 1939. The rural setting of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church is preserved with its visual emphasis on the 1853 Greek Revival-style church.

ⁱⁱ William Elliott Norman was the son of J. H. and A. P. Norman. He was born on July 31, 1886 and died May 24, 1901.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Religion _____

Period of Significance

1853 – 1889 _____

Significant Dates

1853, 1889 _____

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Wills, William Henry (1809-1889) _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

unknown _____

Period of Significance (justification)

(See Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph)

Criteria Consideratons (explanation, if necessary)

(See Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph)

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Located near Brinkleyville in the western piedmont section of Halifax County, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church was built in 1853 and is the most significant extant example of Greek Revival-style church architecture in rural Halifax County. This stylish but modest church features a pedimented front gable, a mitred boxed cornice with a deep eave overhang, and a two-bay façade with two entrances. It stands on a stuccoed-pier foundation that simulates cut stone. Following the Civil War, the orientation of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church's floor-plan was reversed and the former slave partition and high pulpit were abandoned in favor of a raised chancel, which was enlarged in 1889 by a rear apse addition. Preaching preferences evolving within the Methodist Protestant denomination during the last half of the nineteenth century initiated these changes. For these reasons, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion C for architecture with local significance. In addition, it meets Criterion B for its association with the Rev. William Henry Wills (1809-1889), a significant nineteenth-century leader in the development of the Methodist Protestant denomination in North Carolina, also at the local level. His ministerial calling began in 1831, soon after the denomination's formation in Halifax County at Whitaker's Chapel in 1828 making him one of the denomination's first ordained ministers. His career spanned over fifty years, influencing and contributing to both state and national church policy on education, administration, and reunification. Rev. Wills' ministry included serving, at various times during his career, seven circuits or stations in the state; presiding as president of the North Carolina Annual Conference in 1848, 1849, and 1868 and as its secretary five times; and attending the national General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, held every four years, as a ministerial delegate nine times between 1850 and 1880 and as its president in 1866. As a delegate at the General Conference's Union Convention in 1877, he supported and played a key role in the north-south re-unification of the Methodist Protestant Church. A Biblical scholar and adept parliamentarian, Wills helped develop within the North Carolina Conference an annual reporting system that included growth statistics and need assessments. In 1878, he promoted the division of the North Carolina Conference to create a Western Conference. As an educator, he also supported in North Carolina the formation of local schools and their endorsement by the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. An advocate of higher education, Wills supported the organization of Yadkin College by the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and also served as a trustee for Lynchburg Methodist Protestant College in Virginia. In Brinkleyville near his Halifax County home, he helped establish two local schools, the Halifax Male Academy and Elba Female Seminary. Both schools were organized in the mid-1850s following the construction of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church and were endorsed by the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. Today, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church stands as the most directly associated with the productive life of the Rev. William Henry Wills. Its period of significance for Criterion C extends from 1853 to 1889 and spans that period from the construction of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church to its 1889 interior updates, including the addition of the apse and new chancel furniture. The 1889 date also corresponds with Wills' death, although the period of significance for Criterion B begins in 1853 with the church's construction and ends in 1884 when a debilitating stroke led to Wills' withdrawal from church ministry. The church also meets Criteria Consideration A as its primary significance is derived from its architecture.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Historical Background

A native of Edgecombe County from Tarboro, William Henry Wills actively and faithfully served the Methodist Protestant Church throughout most of his life. His contributions extend for nearly sixty years beginning at Whitaker's Chapel, located to the east of Enfield in Halifax County, and include many types of service ranging from ministerial duties within a local circuit to serving as president of both the North Carolina Annual Conference and the national General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. The Revs. John L. Michaux and A. C. Harris detail the life of Dr. Wills in their "Memorial of Rev. William H. Wills, D. D." written in 1889 soon after his death. Wills was a man who was loyal "to God, to conscience, to duty, and to his church..."³ His ministerial career was virtually uninterrupted except for the nine years following his marriage in 1835. Prior to this time, Wills preached his first sermon at Hebron Church in Edgecombe County on May 22, 1831 and served as Secretary for the North Carolina Annual Conference in 1832 and 1833. During the North Carolina Annual Conference held at Whitaker's Chapel in 1833, Wills was elected a deacon, ordained, and then assigned to the Granville circuit as Superintendent. Wills apparently was living in Williamsborough. The following year he

³ "Memorial of Rev. William Henry Wills, D. D." *Minutes of North Carolina Conference*, 1889, 42-43.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

served as an assistant on the Roanoke circuit. Although Wills was not present at the 1835 annual conference held in February at Rehoboth M. P. Church in Granville County, he was recommended to receive elders' orders and then listed as an unstationed minister, a status that he maintained until 1844.⁴

Wills' devotion during these ten years turned to his family. He married on May 13, 1835, Anna Maria Baker Whitaker (1817-1893), the daughter of a prominent Halifax County physician Dr. Cary Whitaker (1782-1858). Whitaker was a long-standing and active member of Whitaker's Chapel located in a rural village known as Whitakertown east of Enfield. Seven years earlier in 1828 unrest nationally within the Methodist Episcopal Church culminated at Whitaker's Chapel initiating there the creation of the Methodist Protestant denomination and ultimately its adoption by the congregation at Whitaker's Chapel. Following marriage, William Henry Wills' previous work experience with R. & S. D. Cotten, a mercantile business in Tarboro, assisted him as he returned to the trade working first in Halifax and then in Tarboro. Two brothers, Randolph and Spencer Dew Cotten, owned R. & S. D. Cotten. In August 1833, Spencer D. Cotten had written Wills, encouraging him to settle down and to come back into business with him.⁵ His subsequent marriage to S. D. Cotten's niece linked the two families, especially following Cotten's untimely death in 1837. Shortly thereafter, the Wills family moved to Tarboro to aid Cotten's widow, Margaret Whitaker Cotten, and her two children. By 1841, newspaper ads for the auction of R. & S. D. Cotten identify Wills as the sales agent for the business, which was sold on November 23, 1841. The sale included a store-house, outhouses, four warehouses, a kitchen, a smokehouse, and a garden.⁶

As Wills' business with the Cottens came to an end, he purchased on November 15, 1841, an 870-acre property east of Brinkleyville in Halifax County. Located on Rocky Swamp, this plantation was sold by Sterling H. Gee to Wills for \$2,700 and was called Rocky Hill by the Wills family as early as 1842; Rocky Hill and its ancillary buildings no longer stand.⁷ The family grew to include nine children, three boys and six girls: Richard Henry (1836-1891), Martha Eliza (1839-1927), George Whitaker (1842-1864), Lucy Cary (1844-1908), Edward (1846-1900), Mary Lawrence (1848-1941), Harriett Whitaker (1852-1942), Cornelia Anna (1854-1930), and Agnes Olivia (1857-1886).⁸ Rocky Hill contained approximately 225 acres of improved land, and Wills operated his plantation using slave labor. In 1850, its principal crops were Indian corn, wheat, oats, peas and beans, and sweet potatoes. In addition to horses, mules, and oxen, livestock holdings included cattle, sheep, and swine. By 1860, however, sheep were excluded and the plantation's six bales of ginned cotton produced in 1850 increased to sixteen. Its slave population also rose from twenty-one to thirty-two and lived in seven slave houses. The increasing prosperity of the plantation during these antebellum years helped Wills successfully shift his economic future from that of a merchant to a farmer in the 1850 U. S. census. A decade later, he clearly identified himself as a Methodist Protestant minister.

Wills' active return to the ministry, however, began in 1844 when he filled a vacancy within the Roanoke Circuit created by the resignation of Rev. William Lineberry and then became an assistant on the circuit for the next few years. In the summer of 1848, Wills shifted the focus of his ministry to the western circuits "starting from his home, full of zeal and ardor, to assist his brethren...in their camp and protracted meeting."⁹ Alamance and Guilford counties were within this area. His success and rise in prominence within the Methodist Protestant Church were soon underscored by his election to serve as president of the North Carolina Conference at its annual fall meeting held October 20 to 24, 1848, at Fair Grove in Rockingham County, and again the next year at the annual meeting held at Whitaker's Chapel. A well-organized and adept parliamentarian, Wills was well known for being punctual. He became, in 1849, the first president of the North Carolina Conference to give at its annual meeting a report detailing the status of various "fields of labor."¹⁰

⁴ Ibid., 36-37; "Our Pioneers Rev. W. H. Wills, D.D." *Our Church Record*, September 29, 1898, 4. Unstationed refers to a minister not having any assigned responsibilities to a specific church or congregation.

⁵ Fleming, "Cotten Family in Edgecombe County," *Daily Southerner*, March 19, 2007; Letter to W. H. Wills from S. D. Cotten, August 29, 1833, William Henry Wills Papers, Southern Historical Collection, UNC-CH. Note: S. D. Cotten (1777-1837) was married to Margaret Whitaker, the daughter of Col. John Whitaker of Halifax County and Anna Maria Whitaker Wills' aunt.

⁶ "Auction Sales," *Tarboro Press*, October 23, 1841.

⁷ Letter to W. H. Wills from J. W. Cotten, April 18, 1842, William Henry Wills Papers, Southern Historical Collection, UNC-CH. Rocky Hill and its ancillary buildings no longer stand.

⁸ U. S. Census, population schedule, Halifax County, N. C., 1860; Wills, "Southern Sulky Ride in 1837, From N.C. Alabama," *Southern History Association*, November 1902, 6:471-472; Gammon, *Marriage Records of Halifax County, N.C.*, 61, 106, 93; Manning, *Headstones of Halifax*, 1: 13-14; "Death of an Estimable Lady," *Roanoke News*, May 13, 1886.

⁹ "Memorial of Rev. William Henry Wills, D. D." *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1889, 37-38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

By 1850, the Roanoke Circuit, known as the “old cradle,” covered such a large area that a plan was implemented to divide it in two, an old lower and new upper circuit. With A. W. Lineberry as superintendent, the lower Roanoke Circuit would continue to have oversight of thirteen points that spanned as far south as Goldsboro and included Whitaker’s Chapel. The new upper circuit was named the Halifax Circuit, with John F. Speight as superintendent, and it included Bloomfield, Union, Grovehill, Warrenton, Corinth, Quankey, Weldon, Halifax, and Eden.¹¹ Five established churches comprised the new circuit: Union, Corinth, Bloomfield, Quankey, and Eden. In towns like Halifax, its old Free Church was used by various denominations for worship, and, in all likelihood, the Methodist Protestants did too. In 1852, Wills served as an assistant to the Halifax Circuit, an action that allowed him to remain close to home and have oversight of the development of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church. On January 10, 1852, Benjamin Johnson initiated the addition of this sixth church when he deeded two acres of land east of Brinkleyville near Wills’ home to William Henry Wills, Benjamin Hunter, Littleberry W. Batchelor, Joshua S. Swift, and W. H. Jones for the use of the Methodist Protestant Church. This property was located on the main road connecting the towns of Warrenton and Halifax, the county seats respectively of Warren and Halifax counties.¹²

Completed in 1853, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church was “built under the inspiration and supervision” of the Rev. William Henry Wills.¹³ Its principal contributors were Rev. William Henry Wills, Benjamin Hunter, L. W. Batchelor, David Parker, and R. J. Vinson as well as others. All were local merchants and/or farmers; however, Vinson may have been a carpenter.¹⁴ An unverified local tradition also has associated James B. Boseman, a local farmer, with the construction of the frame Greek Revival-style church.¹⁵ Its original appearance was described as follows: “The building is 30 x 40 feet and very substantially built....The altar first stood in front, so arranged by Rev. William Henry Wills that the congregation might not have to turn to see persons entering the church. The back part was partitioned off for the colored people.”¹⁶ Initially, a number of members from Union Church shifted to Bethesda. A year after its completion, a Quarterly Conference for the Halifax Circuit was held there on April 22, 1854, at which time the preaching schedule for Bethesda was set for the second Sunday in the month, a schedule that was followed throughout the nineteenth century. In 1858, a stove was installed with a pipe connecting it to a chimney flue in the roof.¹⁷

An ardent supporter of education, William Henry Wills promoted the organization of two local boarding schools, the Halifax Male Academy in 1855 and, shortly thereafter, Elba Female Seminary. The Rev. Jesse H. Page (1831-1903) served as the principal for both schools and each placed an emphasis on religious training. On December 2, 1856, Wills married Page and his eldest daughter, Martha Eliza. Raised within the Methodist Episcopal Church, Page joined the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference in 1858. The schools continued until their closure in 1868.¹⁸ Concurrently, Wills also served as a trustee of Lynchburg Methodist Protestant College from 1855 until it closed its doors in 1861.¹⁹

Work within the North Carolina Annual Conference and General Conference serving as a delegate and elected official remained a part of Wills’ active ministry. At the North Carolina Conference, he was elected its secretary in 1853, 1856, and 1857. Following the death of John F. Speight in 1860, Wills was appointed to serve out Speight’s term as president of the North Carolina Conference. Later, in 1868, he was elected as its president.²⁰ On a national level, from 1846 until 1870, Wills was chosen repeatedly as one of North Carolina’s ministerial delegates to the General Conference, which was held every four years.²¹ Following the Civil War, at the General Conference in Georgetown in 1866, he was elected its president and, with the delegation, called upon President Andrew Johnson at the White House. After remarks were made by Wills and President Johnson, Wills, wearing a black homespun suit proudly stated to the president: “Sir, the clothes that I have on are entirely of home production, my wife and daughters having dyed, and spun the wool, woven the

¹¹ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, November 1850, 300.

¹² Cross, “First House of Worship in Halifax.”

¹³ “Memorial of Rev. William Henry Wills, D. D.” *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1889, 44.

¹⁴ U. S. Census, 1850, Halifax County, Western District records a Robt. Vinson as a young married carpenter living near John Harper a fifty-seven year old carpenter.

¹⁵ Taves, *Historic Architecture of Halifax County*, 64-65.

¹⁶ “Bethesda Church,” *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Memoir of Rev. Jesse H. Page,” *Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1904, 28-29.

¹⁹ “W. H. Wills” file, Research Branch, N. C. Office of Archives and History; “Memoir of Rev. Jesse H. Page,” *N.C. Annual Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 28-29.

²⁰ Carroll, *History of North Carolina. Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, Appendix C, 96-98.

²¹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina. Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, Appendix D, 101-102.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

cloth, cut out the garments and made them with their own hands."²² A plain spoken and frugal man, Wills returned home to the rigors of the Reconstruction years.

The prosperity of the Wills family had risen significantly prior to the Civil War but suffered set-backs following its aftermath. By 1860, their real estate holdings were valued at \$15,220 and personal assets totaled \$29,725. Wills' eldest son Richard Henry Wills at the age of twenty also became a Methodist Protestant preacher and remained a part of the Wills household. The other four oldest children attended school and the three youngest were at home with their mother, Anna, who like many women in the area was listed as a seamstress in the 1860 Census.²³ During the Civil War, two sons served the Confederacy, George Whitaker with the 43rd North Carolina Regiment and Edward, the junior reserves of the 2nd North Carolina Regiment. George was killed on September 19, 1864 at Winchester, Virginia, but Edward returned to help work the farm.²⁴ Throughout much of the war, the Rev. Richard Henry Wills served as a circuit preacher in the Plymouth and Mackey's Ferry area, and on January 20, 1864, he married Anna Louisa Norman, the daughter of Joseph S. Norman of Washington County. The marriage of Lucy Cary to Brinkleyville merchant, James E. Hunter (1843-1908), on October 11, 1869 further decreased the Wills household.²⁵

On the farm, the years following the war were difficult, with livestock and crop production significantly diminished. The family, however, persevered and continued to work the land, remaining reasonably self-sufficient. Wills was able to keep his land holdings virtually intact. In 1870, the real estate value of the 835-acre farm was \$3,340 and Wills' personal assets amounted to \$830. Wages for farm labor had cost him \$400.²⁶ However, over the next ten years, cotton production rose from one bale to fifteen and a six-acre apple orchard with 200 trees was planted. Sufficient profits allowed for the hire of approximately three farm laborers. By 1880, property valuation for the farm had nearly doubled as well as the value of farm production. Mules and oxen continued to be used to farm the land. In 1880, Edward still remained a part of the Wills household, but he was also working to establish his own farm from the one hundred acres sold to him in 1877 by his parents.²⁷ On December 22, 1881, Edward married Agnes E. Whitaker (1851-1899), the daughter of Ferdinand H. Whitaker from Whitakertown.²⁸

The loss and hardship associated with the Civil War and the Reconstruction years took a toll on the health of Rev. Wills and by 1870 began to limit his ministry. Although he had attended the General Conference in 1870, his poor health governed his level of engagement over the next six years first as an unattached minister and then in 1873, as a superannuated or retired member of the clergy. Wills did receive an honorary doctorate of divinity degree from Western Maryland College in 1872, and another from Yadkin College, a North Carolina Methodist Protestant school established in 1855.²⁹ In May 1877, at the joint general convention of the Methodist and Methodist Protestant churches held in Baltimore, known as the Unification Conference, state and national leaders of both churches addressed the movement toward reunification. A member of the North Carolina delegation, Rev. Wills had a major impact on the proposed adoption of this union. An account describes that "his firm, conservative position in important questions won for him and his conference the respect and good will of all" and that he was "an important factor in reaching an amicable adjustment between the two divisions of the church."³⁰ The following year at the North Carolina Annual Conference held at Yadkin College, Dr. Wills submitted the resolution that divided the expanding conference in two by forming a new Western North Carolina Conference.³¹

Over the next few years, Wills renewed his participation in the North Carolina Conference, which included serving as agent for the Greensboro mission in 1877, Conference Evangelist in 1878, and agent to the LaGrange Mission in 1879. Beginning in 1880, his work assignments involved various circuits, namely the Tar River in 1880 and 1883 and the Roanoke in 1881 and 1882. While in charge of the LaGrange Mission in 1884 and visiting there, Wills was permanently

²² Rives, "William H. Wills," *Dictionary of N. C. Biography*, 6:223-224.

²³ U. S. Census, 1860, Population and Agriculture schedules, North Carolina, Halifax County, Western District.

²⁴ Wills, "Southern Sulky Ride in 1837, From N.C. Alabama," *Southern History Association*, November 1902, 6:471-472.

²⁵ Hunter-Skillman Bible, <http://www.ncgenweb.us/ncwarren/bibles/hunter-skill.htm>.

²⁶ U. S. Census, 1870, Population and Agriculture schedules, North Carolina, Halifax County, Brinkleyville Township.

²⁷ U. S. Census, 1880, Population and Agriculture schedules, North Carolina, Halifax County, Brinkleyville Township.

²⁸ Wills, "Southern Sulky Ride in 1837, From N.C. Alabama," *Southern History Association*, November 1902, 6:471-472.

²⁹ "Memorial of Rev. William Henry Wills, D. D." *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1889, 39; Rives, "William H. Wills," *Dictionary of N. C. Biography*, 6:223-224; "Yadkin College," *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, 1238.

³⁰ "Memorial of Rev. William Henry Wills, D. D." *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1889, 39; "Our Pioneers, Rev. W. H. Wills," *Our Church Record*, September 29, 1898, 4.

³¹ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1878, 409.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

stricken with paralysis on September 19, 1884. He died at home nearly five years later on June 22, 1889, and was buried in the cemetery at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church. In the meantime, his missionary work at LaGrange had inspired the fledgling Methodist Protestant congregation there to build, in 1887, one of the denomination's most architecturally impressive churches in eastern North Carolina, Grace Methodist Protestant Church.³²

As shifts took place at the farm and within the Methodist Protestant Church during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction years, it is thought that Rev. Wills spearheaded changes to Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church. Following the Civil War, ca. 1870, his unusual design for the original floor plan, with entrances flanking the pulpit, was reversed, necessitating the removal of the slave partition, infilling of the front window behind the former pulpit, and centering of the "altar" in the back of the room opposite the entrances in a more typical ecclesiastical manner. At this time, in all likelihood, the original pews were simply reoriented and the pulpit repositioned. However, over twenty years later, significant alterations were again undertaken and completed by the fall of 1889. Wills remained a lifelong active member of the church. However, whether or not Rev. Wills was orchestrating these changes before his death that summer is uncertain. An accounting of these changes states the following: "at an expense of about \$450, the room was remodeled by enlarging the windows and making them 12 instead of 24 light, new and more comfortable seats put in, new pulpit and altar, and pulpit furniture, a recess for the pulpit, neat lamps, walls calcimined, etc. so that we now have one of the neatest rooms in the section."³³ In Scotland Neck and Weldon, newspapers briefly described these improvements as repairs and painting that included new benches and produced an overall "comfortable and neat house."³⁴

Following the turn of the twentieth century, the active association of the Wills family with Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church diminished. Many in the immediate family were deceased or living elsewhere in the state. However, the church remained a vital part of the Halifax Circuit as Brinkleyville became a more cohesive rural village with general stores, a cotton gin, sawmills, and a school. An agricultural economy continued to support the community. Over time, modest physical changes were made to Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church through the efforts of the local Home Demonstration Club during their heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. Up until this time, the paired entrances had separate wooden steps with enclosed wooden railings leading up to each door. These steps were replaced by a connecting stoop with a perimeter railing and separate steps leading to each entrance. Gabled hoods with small bracket supports were added to protect each entrance. The church's pier foundation was also infilled, and shrubs, possibly azaleas, were planted around the church.³⁵ About this same time, in 1927, stained-glass windows were added in the apse as a memorial to Nathaniel Mason Harrison. Rural electrification began to transform rural life locally in 1939 as power lines were installed in the Brinkleyville area. However, when the church received electric lights is uncertain.

In 1939, another transformation was taking place within the Methodist Protestant Church, the long-anticipated merger of the Methodist Protestant Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to create the national Methodist Church.³⁶ Over thirty years later, on September 27, 1967, North Carolina acknowledged the historical significance of the contributions made by Dr. William Henry Wills to the Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina and the General Conference by erecting a North Carolina Historical Highway Marker in his honor at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church. "Rocky Hill," the former home of Wills, no longer stands, leaving Bethesda Protestant Church as the primary site associated with the life and career of the Rev. William Henry Wills.

The church and its property were sold in 2007 by the United Methodist Church to three descendants of Benjamin Hunter, a family associated with Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church throughout its history with a keen interest in its preservation.

Religious Context

During the 1820s, the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States experienced challenges from within by a developing democratic reform movement that would ultimately cause an irreconcilable rift within the denomination. Precipitated by a growing democratic spirit nationally, this movement sought to include lay participation in church governance and a more inclusive voice for ministers at all governmental levels beyond quarterly meetings to include

³² Ibid., 40.

³³ "Bethesda Church," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 8.

³⁴ "From Ringwood," *The Democrat*, October 17, 1889; "Ringwood Ripples," *Roanoke News*, October 17, 1889.

³⁵ Taves, *Historic Architecture of Halifax County, N. C.*, 94-95, 148-149.

³⁶ Lepley, "Methodist Church," *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, 732-733. Note: It was not until 1968 that the United Methodist Church was created by another merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

annual conferences and general conventions. The rejection of these democratic reforms at the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, in 1824, prompted reform advocates to withdraw to another location in Baltimore where they established the first Union Society on May 21, 1824, to promote more democratic governance. Over the next four years, these unresolved tensions within the Methodist Episcopal Church led union societies to organize the first Conference of Methodist Reformers in Baltimore, and on November 22, 1828, its delegates adopted seventeen "Articles of Association" as its guiding principles. Two years later, at its second General Convention in Baltimore, these Methodist Reformers officially adopted the Methodist Protestant name.³⁷

Throughout this period in North Carolina, reformers within the Methodist Episcopal Church were at the forefront of the controversy and encouraged the formation of the state's first union society, the Roanoke Union Society, on November 6, 1824, at Sampson's meetinghouse in Halifax County. It was the second to be organized in the United States, and initially its membership included seven local ministers and four laymen, with Eli B. Whitaker as president.³⁸ The Granville Union Society, the second in the state, was not established until July 1826. Over time, the Methodist Episcopal leadership increasingly suspended and expelled reform advocates in the state. The suspension of seven preachers within the Roanoke Circuit in October 1828 and the conclusion of the first Conference of Methodist Reformers in Baltimore the next month precipitated the following call that was advertised in the *Tarborough Free Press* on December 5, 1828:

At a meeting of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church [sic], held at the Rev. James Hunter's, Nov. 28, 1828, for the purpose of devising ways and means to carry into effect the object of the late convention of Methodist Reformers, held in Baltimore, it was determined to hold a Conference at Whitaker's Chapel, six miles east of Enfield, Halifax county [sic], 19th December next; to which we invite particularly all Ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, friendly to a reform in her government, and an equal number at least, of lay delegates, as also all persons friendly to our views.³⁹

Participants formed the North Carolina Annual Conference, the oldest within the national Methodist Protestant Church.⁴⁰ As union societies continued to be organized in the state, eight churches voted to withdraw from the Methodist Episcopal Church: Sampson's, Eden, and Whitaker's Chapel, in Halifax County; Union in Granville County; Liberty in Randolph County; and Moriah, Bethel, and Flat Rock in Guilford County.⁴¹ By the time of the second General Convention in 1830, Methodist reformers in North Carolina managed six circuits: four older ones – Roanoke, Liberty, Warrenton, and Oxford – plus two new ones, Hillsborough and Guilford.⁴²

The Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina initially drew from the strength of each circuit as it reached out to expand into other areas of the state. Early on, the annual conference appointed to each circuit a preacher-in-charge and later a superintendent, who had the power to appoint quarterly meetings and to call quarterly conferences within their respective circuits. In 1830, nine ministers and preachers were working in North Carolina. This number had grown to twenty-five by 1850. Over these twenty years, the membership within the denomination increased from 1,832 in 1835 to 4,187 in 1850. However, membership within the established circuits fluctuated, but on average remained steady. For example, in the Roanoke Circuit the membership figures ranged from 355 in 1833 to 391 in 1843 and 311 in 1845. North Carolina members were active in the General Convention, with directives to voice their opposition to such tests for membership as ones calling for the abolition of slavery or the advocacy of temperance societies and Sunday schools.⁴³ To extend the work of the conference throughout the state, the Methodist Protestant Missionary Society of the North Carolina Conference was formed in 1845.⁴⁴ Throughout the antebellum period, membership included people of all economic backgrounds, including slaves and their owners.

³⁷ Whitaker's Chapel National Register of Historic Places nomination, 8:6-7. Note: Much of the religious context for this nomination was originally researched and written by the author for the Whitakers Chapel nomination.

³⁸ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 13-14.

³⁹ *Free Press* (Tarboro, N.C.), December 5 & 12, 1828.

⁴⁰ Paris, *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 182-183, 288; *Journal North Carolina Conference, Associated, Methodist Protestant Church*, December 19, 1828, 1; *Free Press* (Tarboro, N. C.), December 26, 1828; Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 23-24.

⁴¹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 14-15; Clark, *Methodism in Western North Carolina*, 69.

⁴² Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 16-17, 24.

⁴³ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, February 19, 1842, 127.

⁴⁴ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 26.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

Within the Methodist Protestant Church, like most Protestant denominations, an education was highly valued, with the ability to read the Bible viewed as an important step toward a deeper faith. Its church founders were educated people and many lay delegates were "professional men with college degrees."⁴⁵ However, its members were "mostly farmers with simple, rural ways, trying to extract a living for their families from a hundred or so acres of land, but they knew their future as a denomination depended on education."⁴⁶ According to Methodist Protestant Church historian, J. Elwood Carroll, an early approach to education was through the endorsement of specific schools and colleges, both inside and outside of North Carolina, which was followed by the founding of denominational colleges. Madison College, a Methodist Protestant school situated in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, received this support for several years from the North Carolina Conference. At this Conference in 1851, education discussions were centered on establishing a seminary, its location, and financing. Church leaders, including Revs. Alson Gray, William Henry Wills, and John F. Speight, were actively involved in considering the "propriety of establishing a Conference school for the education of young men."⁴⁷ Located west of Lexington in Davidson County, North Carolina, Yadkin College Institute was chartered in 1855 by the State of North Carolina and opened its doors to students in October 1856. About this same time, Jamestown Female College was completed and Rev. Alson Gray served as field agent for the school.⁴⁸ The endorsement and maintenance of secondary schools scattered across the state also evolved. In Halifax County near Brinkleyville, a boy's school was endorsed by the Rev. William Henry Wills and others. Later in Brinkleyville during the mid-1850s, the North Carolina Annual Conference endorsed and recommended to its constituents the Halifax Male Academy and Elba Female Seminary that were organized by Jesse H. Page and Rev. Wills.⁴⁹

Rapid growth within the Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina over the next fifty years necessitated the creation of new circuits and the construction of many churches. In 1830, six circuits were operating in the state. Known as the "old cradle," the Roanoke Circuit was first divided in 1850 to produce the Halifax Circuit. By 1880, it had spawned three additional circuits.⁵⁰ By 1875, membership had risen to 9,000 among twenty-four circuits. The forty churches within the annual conference in 1850 had now more than tripled, to 126. During the same period, the number of ministers and preachers rose to forty-six.⁵¹ This rapid growth led to discussions concerning the creation of four sub-districts that would include three or more circuits.⁵²

Growth in the Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina was stimulated by the evangelistic leadership of its circuit-riding ministers who established missions in both the eastern and western areas of the state. Many of these early ministers became leaders in the annual conference. They included John F. Speight (1804-1860), C. F. Harris, William H. Wills (1809-1889), A. W. Lineberry, T. H. Pegram, John L. Michaux (1824-1898), and Richard Henry Wills (1836-1891). William Henry Wills also served on the national level, in 1866, as president of the General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church.⁵³ An 1880 report describing the Tar River circuit notes that Richard H. Wills' ministry had "...gone into the 'Highway and Hedges' and brought out new places for preaching...."⁵⁴

Even though the rural character of the Methodist Protestant church in North Carolina remained dominant throughout the nineteenth century, beginning in 1873 church leaders began to consider seriously the establishment of city churches. Earlier struggles to establish churches in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Edenton, and Rocky Mount were unsuccessful and, in the end, each was discontinued. However, the church in Enfield grew along with the town, which was incorporated in 1861. It hosted the Annual Conference in 1859, 1874, and 1886.⁵⁵ By 1873, the Winston mission was the denomination's only city church in the state and Greensboro as a mission field was a topic of discussion. The Annual Conference's Committee on Missions that year made this recommendation "...under all circumstances, the time has come

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶ Fick, *Country College on the Yadkin*, 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6, 63; Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 49.

⁴⁹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 47.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, November 1850, 300; November 12, 1852, 4; December 1880, 512.

⁵¹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 106.

⁵² *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, November 1877, 465-466.

⁵³ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, Appendix C, n.p.; Bassett, *Concise History Methodist Protestant Church*, 206.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, December 1880, 508.

⁵⁵ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, Appendix C, n.p.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

when we should turn our attention to the towns, more particularly than we have done heretofore.”⁵⁶ By the mid-1870s the proposal was out of committee and being accepted by the circuits as noted by the following resolution presented at the Annual Conference on December 3, 1875: “The Quarterly Conference of the Halifax Ct. [Circuit], makes its request to the [sic] An. Conference that ‘its Missionary efforts be directed more toward towns and cities of the State.’”⁵⁷ It was signed by William Henry Wills, the committee chairman, and J. E. Hunter, its secretary. Although inclusion of this shift in focus was slow in coming, the conference did contribute to the Winston church in 1880. City churches were organized in Henderson in 1881 and Greensboro in 1891.⁵⁸

Growth necessitated the construction of new churches across North Carolina, and the North Carolina Missionary Society provided seed money in many cases for these construction projects. In 1882, the society’s name was changed to the Board of Church Extension.⁵⁹ Richard H. Wills wrote in his 1883 president’s report, “Churches have been built, begun or completed and old ones repaired, but to what extent I do not know.”⁶⁰ The following year he took note of their condition and progress within the conference and shared his observations and opinions within his president’s report: “Many of the structures, called churches, are a shame to us. Poor, unsightly buildings, costing and worth but few dollars, sometimes in out-of-the-way places, constitute our church property and places of worship in some localities, forming sometimes a striking contrast to those of other denominations near by. These things ought not so to be, and it may be hoped will not long exist.” He went on to say: “A good church at every appointment might be an appropriate motto for the next year. These should be on our own ground, with a *bona fide* title to the Methodist Protestant Church....Let the good work go on.”⁶¹

Two years later, in 1886, Richard H. Wills, chairman of the Church Extension Committee, submitted a recommendation, which was approved, calling for the establishment of the Church Extension Fund of the North Carolina Conference, “the exclusive object of which shall be to assist in the building of churches in weak and destitute places.”⁶² By 1891, there were 191 Methodist Protestant churches within the annual conference, an increase of sixty-five churches in fifteen years. However, the Board of Church Extension began focusing primarily on the development of city churches about 1890.⁶³ Until then churches sporadically were built in developing small towns, such as Kernersville in 1885 and LaGrange in 1887.⁶⁴ Late in 1886, Greensboro became a designated mission point, and church interests there were addressed by a committee of seven led by the Rev. Richard H. Wills and J. B. Ball. In 1892, a “city church” was finally completed in Greensboro, the county seat for Guilford County. Its pastor, Rev. W. F. Ohrum, named it “Grace.”⁶⁵ Soon after, the Rev. J. F. McCulloch became its next leader and in 1894 established *Our Church Record*, a paper for Methodist Protestants.⁶⁶

In his president’s report at the 1896 North Carolina Annual Conference, the Rev. W. A. Bunch provided a detailed update on city church development in the state. He stated: “In the past six years, we have organized societies and built church edifices in the towns of Greensboro, Asheboro, Liberty, Burlington, Gibsonville, High Point, New London, Creswell, and McFarland, and the way opened to work and to some extent done in Siler City, Yadkinville, and Pinnacle. The work accomplished in those towns has added more to our prestige and influence as a denomination than the fifty-five years’ work which had preceded it.”⁶⁷ With “scores of our people” relocating in Charlotte, a mission was established there over the next two years.⁶⁸

The twentieth century for the Methodist Protestant denomination in North Carolina marked a shift from rapid expansion to a time of maturity and then reconciliation. While membership rose significantly from 19,772 in 1905 to 30,735

⁵⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁷ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, December 3, 1875, 508.

⁵⁸ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 29-30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁰ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, November-December 1883, 174.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, November-December 1884, 223.

⁶² *Minutes of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*, December 1886, 314.

⁶³ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 26.

⁶⁴ “Kernersville Church,” *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3; “Grace Church, LaGrange,” *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 12.

⁶⁵ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 29-30; “Grace Church, Greensboro,” *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3.

⁶⁶ Pritchard, “Brief History of the N. C. Conference,” 120. Note: Over time, the name of *Our Church Record* was changed to the *Methodist Protestant Herald*.

⁶⁷ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

in 1935, the total number of churches rose by only sixteen to 232 in 1935.⁶⁹ A growing population in urban centers accounts for some of the change. As plans were presented proposing unification within the Methodist Church, the Methodist Protestant Church became the first church to approve the plan at its General Conference in High Point in 1936.⁷⁰ With unification nearing, North Carolina's Annual Conference made arrangements in 1938 to have a history of the Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina written. *History of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church* by J. Elwood Carroll was published in 1939, the year of the Methodist unification.⁷¹

Architectural Context

Church construction in rural North Carolina during the first half of the nineteenth century predominately drew upon the vernacular building traditions of its builders, reflected the preferences of the clergy and/or congregation, and depended on the availability of materials and their cost. Most exhibited log, plank, or mortise-and-tenon frame construction. Early in the century as a "wave of evangelical Protestantism swept the countryside," these denominations tended to build either a meetinghouse or a more Anglican inspired gable-front church.⁷² These meetinghouses typically featured a side-gable roof and a plan that placed the main entrance opposite the pulpit and side entrances at each gable end. Protestant churches with a gable-front orientation usually had a central entrance and aisle that often led to a communion table with a pulpit to one side.⁷³ Each of these forms could accommodate a gallery depending on the size and needs of the congregation. All windows and doors were rectilinear and could vary in size. Paired entrances signified a gender separation with men using one and women using the other. This separation sometimes extended to the interior with low partitions or rails maintaining this division.

Evangelicals strove in their faith to concentrate on salvation and self discipline in addition to avoiding worldly distractions. Although economics played a role in the construction of many churches, especially missions, Protestants dismissed elaborate building forms and Christian symbolism. According to architectural historian Catherine W. Bishir, however, as architectural preferences transitioned through revival styles during the antebellum period, "growth and, especially, the changing status and self-image of evangelical Protestant denominations...supported the transformation of their church architecture." This transformation shifted in tandem with Protestant positions on "social issues, including slavery" while they "consciously assumed a new role as a mainstream majority."⁷⁴

Houses of worship built for the fledgling Methodist Protestant denomination drew upon the established building traditions of the region beginning in the 1830s and carried into the post-Reconstruction period. The circuit-riding zeal of its ministers energized new members to establish rural missions that oftentimes initially constructed for worship either brush arbors or rudimentary log structures, followed later by frame churches. Within the Roanoke Circuit during this initial period, descriptive accounts of Bradford's meetinghouse, Corinth Church, and Whitaker's Chapel, all of which are in Halifax County, vary. The construction of Corinth Church in 1829 or 1830 was precipitated by the expulsion of two Methodist Episcopal ministers, Caswell Drake and Ned Dromgoole as well as Richard Jones, an influential and wealthy sympathizer. Located on the stage road from Warrenton to Halifax near Gretna Green, Corinth Church was described as:

...a good-sized frame house with plank floors, the plank floors resting solidly on the ground, there being no underpinning at all. There were three windows, one on each side; these being a solid wooden flap, about eight feet long, put in, the length horizontal, and when open set like a dead fall; and the third a small window of four panes of 8x10 glass which was over the little box pulpit, and when the preacher stood up his head did not quite reach up to it.⁷⁵

It served the congregation until replaced by a new frame one built in 1856. On the other hand, Whitaker's Chapel and Bradford's meetinghouse were associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church from the late eighteenth century. Initially, a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁰ Clark, *Methodism Western N. C.*, 70.

⁷¹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, x.

⁷² Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 58.

⁷³ Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 57-58.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁷⁵ "Corinth," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 6. Note: During the seventieth anniversary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the newspaper of North Carolina Conference, *Our Church Record*, published special historical issues in 1898. Copies of the first two are located in the Ralph Hardee Rives Collection #24, Manuscripts and Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

log structure served Whitaker's Chapel, but little is known about Bradford's meetinghouse except that its camp meeting site included "log huts for tents." At Whitaker's Chapel, the log building was replaced by an unfinished frame one with no ceiling. However, a "third building, nicely plastered and painted" replaced it soon after the December 19, 1828, meeting of the first Annual Conference of Reformers in North Carolina.⁷⁶ In Randolph County, a log house measuring twenty feet by twenty-four feet was built ca. 1830 for the Pleasant Union Church in Liberty. Over time, it was succeeded by a larger frame building measuring thirty-five by forty-five feet.⁷⁷

Arbors and log churches continued to be built to accommodate some Methodist Protestant congregations through the post-Reconstruction years of the 1870s. In Davidson County near Denton, the Chapel Hill Church Tabernacle (NR, 2012) built in 1870 stands as a rare example of a hand hewn mortise-and-tenon frame arbor directly associated with the Methodist Protestant denomination.⁷⁸ In Halifax County, the ca. 1861 destruction by fire of Marsh Chapel led to the construction nearby of a brush arbor by the Hawkins family. It was used until 1875, when it was replaced by a small frame meetinghouse called Hawkins Chapel.⁷⁹ Most log structures were associated with newly organized missions in the Piedmont and western areas of the state. The preacher for the Liberty Circuit, Rev. A. W. Lineberry, organized in 1867 Midway Church in southern Rockingham County and had a large log structure built that was never fully completed. It continued in use until 1889, when it was replaced by a frame church.⁸⁰ Three years later in 1870, a log structure also was built for Pleasant Grove Church in Davidson County.⁸¹

The construction of heavy-timber frame gable-front churches by these predominately rural Methodist Protestant congregations became more and more prevalent throughout the antebellum period. Raised on pier foundations, early examples maintained a simple unornamented exterior and interior. Beaded or plain weatherboards were used to sheathe the exterior. Windows were rectilinear in shape and contained double-hung sash with multiple lights. At Whitaker's Chapel (NR, 1997), early features included molded weatherboard, flush gable ends with molded rakeboards, and boxed cornices with beaded edges. It also included two front entrances. During the mid-nineteenth century, the incorporation of stylistically popular architectural features, primarily Greek Revival-style, reflected more prosperous times and the blending of Methodist Protestants into the economic mainstream. These frame gable-front churches typically featured gable pediments, deep boxed cornices, weatherboard sheathing, rectilinear windows, and usually two front entrances.

In some cases, local craftsmen and slave carpenters were hired to build a church rather than simply relying on the building skills offered by the congregation. At Bradford's meetinghouse, the Rev. T. E. Eure, a Methodist Episcopal minister and local carpenter, was hired to build its new church in 1845; however, little is known about its appearance.⁸² Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church (NR, 1976) in rural Washington County stands as one of the finest small Greek-Revival churches in North Carolina. Tradition maintains that the slaves of Joseph S. Norman (1804-1864) constructed the church in 1853. In that same year, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church in rural Halifax County was completed. According to an unverified local tradition, James Boseman, a local farmer and possibly carpenter, oversaw this construction project. Both churches exhibit the Greek Revival style with front-gable pediments and two front entrances. The interior plan for Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church, however, includes a slave gallery reached by a small stair entrance at the southeast corner of the side elevation. A low partition down the middle separated the seating for men and women. The original interior plan for Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church was designed by its minister, the Rev. William Henry Wills, with the altar between the front entrances and a slave partition at the rear. Following the Civil War, the placement of the altar was reversed, which required the removal of the partition.⁸³ Shortly after the completion of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, Mt. Pleasant Methodist Protestant Church within the Liberty Circuit was built between 1854 and 1855 by master mechanic Jabin Erwin, at cost of \$500.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ "Corinth" and "Whitaker's Chapel." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 6, 9.

⁷⁷ "Pleasant Union." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 6.

⁷⁸ Touart, *Building the Backcountry*, 142-143.

⁷⁹ "Hawkins Chapel." *Our Church Record*, September 29, 1898, 4.

⁸⁰ "Midway Church." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 5.

⁸¹ "Pleasant Grove." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3.

⁸² "Bradford's." *Our Church Record*, September 29, 1898, 6. Note: The 1860 U. S. Census records two craftsmen possibly brothers originally from Gates County, N.C. living near Enfield: Starky Eure, a 43-year old carpenter and Tinson Eure, a 52-year old mechanic.

⁸³ "Bethesda Church, Halifax ct." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 8.

⁸⁴ "Mt. Pleasant Liberty ct." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 10. Note: Little is known about Erwin except the listing in the 1860 U. S. Census, population schedule for the southern division of Guilford County N.C. records him as Jabus Erwin, a carpenter who was forty years old and had what appears to be two additional but unrelated carpenters within his household.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

After the Civil War, a more dramatic shift in the architectural character of Methodist Protestant churches began slowly to take place in North Carolina. As new churches were constructed to replace or update older ones, their design reflected the availability of mass-produced building materials and hardware. Popular design features for churches were vestibules and apses. Congregations would eventually choose to integrate the seating arrangements for men and women. New frame churches were built for several rural congregations, namely Hickory Grove in 1872, Hawkins Chapel in 1875 and again in 1895, and Midway Church in 1889. At Moriah Church, the church was repainted, a recessed pulpit built, and blinds added to the windows. A recessed pulpit was also added in 1896 to Shiloh Church in the Randolph circuit.⁸⁵ In Halifax County, Whitakers Chapel was moved across the road in 1880 and enlarged by additions, as the following notes: "At the rear there is a recess for the pulpit, and on either side of this there are doors, one leading into the Ministers room, the other into the S. S. Library. The front end of the church consists of a vestibule with east and west doors. The old style pulpit changed to the modern, and carpets are in the pulpit, chancel, and aisles. The organ, though some twenty years old, is still in use."⁸⁶ Nine years later, in 1889, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church also was modified by the addition of a recessed apse as well as new window sash, pews, and chancel furniture.⁸⁷ Both churches also incorporated a curved chancel rail and a similar arched opening for the apse.

Momentum for the development of churches in urban areas by the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Conference began in earnest about 1890. Prior to this, its churches constructed in small villages and towns had begun to reflect the incorporation of a popular church feature, the steeple or bell tower. A new Methodist Protestant church was begun in 1885 and dedicated in 1887 on Cherry Street in Kernersville. This gable-front sanctuary with rear apse exhibited a distinctive square-in-section bell tower that had a pyramidal roof and straddled the ridge of the church roof at the front.⁸⁸ In eastern North Carolina, Grace Methodist Protestant Church in LaGrange reflects a bold shift within the denomination to embrace the Gothic Revival-style. Its central entrance is distinguished by an attached combined vestibule and three-stage bell tower. Pointed arches liberally define window, door, and bell tower ventilator openings. An account in *Our Church Record* provides the following: "[in] 1887 set to work to build a church home....on the corner of Caswell and James Streets a neat, comfortable building of modern design, 32 x 56, 22 feet between joists, with nice stained glass windows, five of which are memorials. The interior is well furnished, costing in all about \$2,300....church was dedicated in June 1889."⁸⁹ This church exhibits a rectilinear plan with a three-bay façade, six-bay side elevation, and an attached central two-stage bell tower featuring a polygonal spire. Two small roof gablets distinguish each side elevation and contain louvered ventilators. The identity of the skilled carpenter and/or builder of the church remains unknown.

Since 1829, a large number of Methodist Protestant churches were associated with the Guilford Circuit, but it was not until 1891 that construction would begin on a Methodist Protestant church in Greensboro, the governmental seat for Guilford County. After raising between \$3,000 and \$4,000, a brick church was constructed that may have been the earliest example of brick being used in the construction of a church by Methodist Protestants in North Carolina. Little is known about Grace except that it was rectilinear in plan with gable-front roof and frame gable ends. Brick buttresses lined the side elevations. A small one-room addition flanked the west side elevation and to the east, a brick bell tower rose ninety feet and was capped by a frame spire. A small brick apse extended from the rear.⁹⁰

The construction of churches by Methodist Protestants slowed significantly during the first forty years of the twentieth century. To celebrate the turn of the new century funds were raised and presented to the Board of Church Extension for city mission projects. Rocky Mount, Reidsville, and Concord benefited from these funds. Over time, new churches were organized in West Burlington, West Thomasville, Lexington, Revolution, and West End, Greensboro.⁹¹ In some cases, urban and rural churches were eventually abandoned or sold. In 1916, the Free Will Baptists in LaGrange began renting Grace Church.⁹² Three years later, the Moravian Church was occupying Grace Church in Greensboro.⁹³ Church historian J. Elwood Carroll wrote: "It is a very expensive undertaking to launch a new church in a thriving city. City

⁸⁵ "Hickory Grove." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3; "Hawkins Chapel." *Our Church Record*, September 29, 1898, 4; "Midway Church." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 5; "Moriah Church," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 4; "Shiloh." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 9.

⁸⁶ "Whitaker's Chapel." *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 9.

⁸⁷ "Bethesda Church, Halifax ct.," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 9.

⁸⁸ "Kernersville Church," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3; Sanborn Map, Kernersville, N.C., February 1915, sheet 2.

⁸⁹ "Grace Church, LaGrange," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 12; Sanborn Map, LaGrange, N.C., July 1914, sheet 2.

⁹⁰ "Grace Church, Greensboro," *Our Church Record*, June 23, 1898, 3; Sanborn Map, Greensboro, N. C., April 1896, sheet 10.

⁹¹ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 31-32.

⁹² Little-Stokes, *Coastal Plain and Fancy*, 301

⁹³ Sanborn Map, Greensboro, N.C., March 1919, sheet 21.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

people demand city accommodations and appearances in their churches. Building and maintaining churches is in a sense a competitive business if a congregation is to be built up in numbers to the place where it is self-supporting.”⁹⁴ During the decade of the Great Depression, the North Carolina Conference had no funds to continue the development of city churches. Combining this economic reality with the need to extend mission opportunities throughout the state, support began to grow for the reunification of the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal denominations. In 1939, the two denominations became one.

Throughout the history of the Methodist Protestants and their churches in North Carolina, general architectural trends for churches in the state are similar. The timeline of these trends within each denomination varies in tandem within the reality and sustainability of its growth and economic potential as well as between urban and rural settings. Catherine Bishir, in *North Carolina Architecture*, recounts these overall trends from traditional meetinghouses to Colonial Revival-style city churches. Styles followed national trends which included over time the adoption of belfries, vestibules, and apses. The use of log in the establishment of rural missions became less commonplace in the 1870s. Frame construction was the norm and brick was becoming less rarified.

Within the Protestant Methodist denomination in eastern North Carolina, two of its rural churches, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church in Halifax County and Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church in Washington County, stand and reflect variations of the Greek Revival style constructed in 1853. Both churches are similar in form and size, but Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church is lower in height due to the exclusion of a slave gallery. Originally, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church had a slave partition that was removed after the Civil War. Both feature a façade with a pedimented gable and two entrances. All side elevations contain three bays, except at Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church’s east elevation, which also includes a door that opens to a stair leading to the slave gallery. Plain weatherboards sheathe the exterior of both churches, including the gable ends. The rear gables retain a traditional flush eave with simple cornice molding returns at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church and full boxed-cornice returns at Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church. The latter is distinguished by expansive double-hung sash windows that contain sixteen-over-sixteen lights. The window openings at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church are smaller and originally contained twelve-over-twelve lights. Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church is entered through double-leaf doors in which each leaf has six square panels vertically-placed. On the other hand, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church has typical Greek Revival-style single-leaf doors, with two vertical panels. On the interior, each church has plaster walls, but Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church also includes a wainscot. Greek Revival-style moldings highlight both churches on the exterior and interior. Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church includes a bold use of cornerblocks with door and window surrounds that complement its corner pilasters and dentil cornice. At Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, the surrounds are simple, with mitered joints and a backband with splay molding profile.

Although Boseman family tradition maintains that during the mid-nineteenth century James B. Boseman built several structures in the Brinkleyville area, including Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, no documentation connects him with the church’s construction. During this period the U. S. census repeatedly identifies Boseman as a farmer of middling means. By 1860, he had \$1,068 in real estate holdings and \$735 in personal property. His personal possessions, however, included a copy of Peter Nicholson’s *Carpenter’s New Guide* published in 1834.⁹⁵

During the antebellum period in the Warren County, at the workshops of two well-documented North Carolina master carpenters, Jacob Holt (1811-1880) and Albert Gamaliel Jones (1812-ca. 1880), regional craftsmen were trained in the building trades. Each became schooled in popular architectural styles and trends of the period, especially the Greek Revival, Italianate, and Gothic Revival styles. Jones, a native of Warren County, was a leading builder in the county by the 1840s. Holt, however, had moved to Warren County with several associates from Prince Edward County, Virginia, by 1845. The works of Jones and Holt are best documented in the *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary* and include residences, public buildings, churches, schools, and their respective dependencies. Between 1848 and 1861, the construction of eight churches of various denominations in Warren, Granville, Wake, and Halifax counties are attributed to Holt. Most are Greek Revival-style in form with pedimented gable fronts that sometimes included distinctive Italianate-style cornices with turned brackets. On the other hand, to-date, no church design or subsequent construction is attributed to Jones.

⁹⁴ Carroll, *History of North Carolina Annual Conference of Methodist Protestant Church*, 32.

⁹⁵ Taves, *Historic Architecture of Halifax County, N. C.*, 57, 147.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

Both Jones and Holt were slaveholders and maintained workshops that included apprentices and slave artisans, some of whom are directly associated with Halifax County. Jones's workshop was small by comparison with Holt's, which would become one of the largest antebellum building firms in the state during the 1850s. Business exchanges existed between the two, as noted by the work done in 1847 for Jones at the Asa Biggs House (NR, 1979), in Williamston, by Holt's journeyman James R. Thrower, a native of western Halifax County. About this time in Halifax County near Medoc Mountain and Brinkleyville, the construction of a frame Greek Revival-style side-hall-plan dwelling at the Matthews Place (NR, 1974) was undertaken ca. 1850 that is attributed to Albert Gamaliel Jones. In 1850, five of Holt's slave artisans and four of his skilled carpenters, Kindred Gupton, Alexander Bennet, John Neal, and William Thompson, were working in the western part of Halifax County. That same year, Thomas Whitmell Harris hired Holt to build in the county just south of Littleton his home, Sunnyside, which in 1873 was destroyed by fire. In 1860, Holt listed himself as a master mechanic and his household included his family as well as fourteen carpenters, one of whom was William Thrower, the younger brother of James R. Thrower. Raised in the Heathsville area of Halifax County near Brinkleyville, three of E. T. Thrower's sons became carpenters. To date no documentary evidence connects Holt with the third brother and carpenter Dewitt, who lived with his father in 1860. Attributed to Holt and his Thrower associates, the plantation home of William Henry Jones, was constructed on the eve of the Civil War just south of Brinkleyville and east of Ringwood. The son of the Rev. Albritton Jones, a Methodist Protestant minister, Jones was a wealthy merchant directly connected with the development of Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church.⁹⁶

Stylistic forms structurally evident at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church suggest a connection with these workshops, especially Holt's, and its later interior appointments underscore their influence. Finely turned but robust balusters and newels compliment the massive and bold features of the pulpit with its brackets featuring drop pendants and column supports. In Warren County, three churches associated with Holt and his workmen clearly convey these Greek Revival-style and Italianate-style influences: the former Warrenton Baptist Church (1849), Hebron Methodist Church (1849; NR, 1984) near Oakville, and Warrenton Presbyterian Church (1857).⁹⁷ The simplicity of the Greek Revival-style temple form at the Warrenton Baptist Church conveys directly to Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church with its pedimented gable. In addition, the pulpits at Hebron Methodist Church and the Warrenton Presbyterian Church with their robust proportions and brackets serve as precursors for the one added to Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church in 1889. New pews were also placed in Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, which are nearly identical to those at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church (1884-87; NR, 1979) in Snow Hill. These pews may represent purchase options more readily available to churches through regional manufacturers during the late-nineteenth century. W. T. Faircloth and the firm of Porter and Godwin from Goldsboro were associated with the construction of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church.⁹⁸

Churches in Halifax County, extant and destroyed, reflect a range of building traditions from the vernacular meetinghouse to architect-attributed structures that were embraced by various religious denominations in rural North Carolina before the Civil War. All surviving antebellum churches exhibit heavy-timber frame construction except for Old Trinity Episcopal Church (NR, 1980), which was built in 1854 of brick, designed by architect Frank Wills, and constructed in the Clarksville area of Scotland Neck. Located in the Heathsville vicinity, Rocky Swamp Primitive Baptist Church is the earliest example in Halifax County and embodies a traditional meetinghouse form with a side-gable roof. This small ca. 1800 structure measuring approximately twenty-four by twenty feet also features a collar-beam rafter system with diagonal wind braces and a tilted-false plate, an eighteenth-century framing technique. For Methodist Protestants, Whitaker's Chapel (NR, 1997) ca. 1830 with its original gable-front orientation, two front entrances, and original Federal-style features embodies the new Protestant tradition.⁹⁹ It features molded weatherboards and three-part surrounds with mitered corners. However, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, built in 1853, conveys the stylistic progression for Methodist Protestants to the Greek Revival style. A pediment graces the front façade with its two entrances and deep boxed cornice. One year later, Old Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, near Airlie, was completed and its construction is attributed to Jacob W. Holt. Destroyed by fire in 1917, the church exhibited a pedimented Greek Revival-style façade with an Italianate-style bracketed cornice and a double-leaf central entrance, trademarks of Holt's work.¹⁰⁰ Two mid-nineteenth-century frame churches, Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church (NR, 1994), near Scotland Neck, and Conoconnara Baptist Church ca. 1849, near Crowells Crossroads, were dismantled and moved relatively short distances to new locations in the 1870s. Both featured plain gable-front façades with paired entrances. Rounding out the late-nineteenth century, developing

⁹⁶ Taves, *Historic Architecture of Halifax County, North Carolina*, 54-57, 134.

⁹⁷ McFarland, *Architecture of Warren County, North Carolina*, 190-193, 199-201; Bullock, "Hebron Methodist Church," National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1984.

⁹⁸ Sandbeck, *Greene Along Contentnea*, 66.

⁹⁹ Taves, *Historic Architecture of Halifax County, N. C.*, 418-419, 313, 301-303.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 207-208.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Name of Property

Halifax County, NC

County and State

architectural trends impacted several of these churches in Halifax County through the following additions: at Rocky Swamp Baptist Primitive Church, a simple boxed cornice with returns; at Whitaker's Chapel, a vestibule, apse, carpet, and two rear rooms, a Sunday School library and minister's room; at Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church, an apse, pews, new window sash, and carpet; and at Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church, a central bell-tower addition.¹⁰¹

Within rural Halifax County, Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church stands as the county's most intact mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival-style church and as the only ecclesiastical example of the style in the southwestern area of the county. Until recently, Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church and Conoconnara Baptist Church were the county's only comparables. The addition of a bell tower in 1901 lessens the stylistic integrity of Kehukee Primitive Baptist Church, and around 2008, Conoconnara Baptist Church was dismantled for a second time.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Articles and Books:

Bassett, Ansel H. *A Concise History of the Methodist Protestant Church, From Its Origin*. Pittsburgh: Wm. McCracken, Jr., 1887.

Bishir, Catherine W. *North Carolina Architecture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Bullock, Marshall. "Hebron Methodist Church." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1984. North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Carroll, J. Elwood. *History of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*. Greensboro: McCulloch & Swain, Printers, 1939.

Clark, Elmer T. *Methodism in Western North Carolina*. [S.l.]: Western North Carolina Conference, Methodist Church, 1966.

Cross, Jerry L. "First House of Worship in the Town of Halifax, 1793-1911." Unpublished research report, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Research Branch, 1987.

Fick, Virginia G. *Country College on the Yadkin: A Historical Narrative*. Winston-Salem, N. C.: Hunter Publishing Company, 1984.

Gammon, David B. *Marriage Records of Halifax County, North Carolina 1817-1868*, N.P.: David Gammon, 1997.

Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1904.

Little, M. Ruth. *Coastal Plain & Fancy: The Historic Architecture of Lenoir County and Kinston, North Carolina*. Kinston, N. C. : Lenoir County Historical Society, Inc., 1998.

McFarland, Kenneth. *The Architecture of Warren County, North Carolina: 1770s to 1860s*. Warrenton, N. C.: Warren County Historical Association, 2001.

Michaux, J. L. and A. C. Harris. "Memorial of Rev. William H. Wills, D. D." *Minutes of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*. New Salem, N.C.: W. C. Phillips, Printer & Publisher, 1889.

Minutes of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. New Salem, N.C.: W. C. Phillips, Printers & Publisher, 1889.

Paris, John. *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*. Baltimore: Sherwood & Co., 1849.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 364-366, 336-337, 313, 301-303.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

Halifax County, NC

Name of Property

County and State

Powell, William S., ed. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*. 6 vols. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

_____. *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Sandbeck, Penne Smith. *Greene along Contentnea: The Architectural History of Greene County, North Carolina*. Snow Hill, N.C.: Greene County Arts and Historical Society, 2009.

Seapker, Janet K. and Robert Tompkins. "Rehoboth Methodist Church, Washington County, NC." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1976. North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Taves, Henry V., Alison H. Black, and David R. Black. *The Historic Architecture of Halifax County, North Carolina*. Edited by Drucilla H. York and J. Daniel Pezzoni. Halifax, N. C.: Halifax County Historical Association, 2010.

Touart, Paul Baker. *Building in the Backcountry: An Architectural History of Davidson County, North Carolina*. Lexington, N.C.: Davidson County Historical Association, 1987.

United States. Census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, Halifax County, North Carolina, population, slave, and agriculture schedules.

Wills, William Henry. "A Southern Sulky Ride in 1837 From North Carolina To Alabama." *Publications of the Southern History Association*, November 1902, 6: 471-483.

York, Drucilla H. "Whitaker's Chapel, Halifax County, NC." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1997. North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Newspapers:

Daily Southerner (Tarboro).

The Democrat (Scotland Neck)

Our Church Record (Greensboro).

Roanoke News (Roanoke Rapids)

Tarboro Press (Tarboro).

Manuscripts and Maps:

Chapel Hill, N. C.

Southern Historical Collection. Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. William Henry Wills Papers.

Durham, N. C.

Duke University, Divinity School Library, Microforms, *Minutes of the Proceedings of North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church*.

Greenville, N. C.

Manuscripts and Rare Books Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University. Hunter-Wills Family Papers, Ralph Hardee Rives Collection.

Halifax, N. C.

Halifax County Register of Deeds Office, Record of Deeds.

Raleigh, N. C.

North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Research Branch, William Henry Wills file.

Sanborn Map Company: Greensboro, 1896, 1919; Kernersville, 1915; LaGrange, 1914.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

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 # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: State Archives, UNC-CH, ECU, Duke Univ.

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1 acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>244770</u> Easting	<u>4017845</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The National Register boundary is shown with heavy line on the accompanying Halifax County tax map at a scale of 1 inch = 104 feet.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundaries contain all of the land historically associated with the church including the church and cemetery.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Drucilla H. York, Architectural Historian
organization Local History Associates date December 8, 2011
street & number 2001 E. Fifth Street telephone 252.752.5260
city or town Greenville state NC zip code 27858
e-mail druyork@embarqmail.com

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church

City or Vicinity: Brinkleyville vicinity

County: Halifax

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Drucilla H. York

Date Photographed: see listing

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 12.

1. NW oblique view of church, February 24, 2011.
2. View of front façade, February 24, 2011.
3. SE oblique view of church, February 24, 2011.
4. Detail of façade corner illustrating juncture of pediment and box cornice, February 24, 2011.
5. Façade west entrance, February 24, 2011.
6. Interior overview of façade entrances, February 24, 2011.
7. Interior overview of chancel, February 24, 2011.
8. Interior detail of chancel with apse, February 24, 2011.
9. Interior detail of communion rail with newel, February 24, 2011.
10. Detail of pews, February 24, 2011.
11. North view of cemetery with chain-link fence and entrance, October 01, 2011.
12. View of cemetery gravestones including Wills' obelisk, October 01, 2011.

Bethesda Methodist Protestant Church
Name of Property

Halifax County, NC
County and State

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.