INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR
Iredell County

X MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR THEMATIC NOMINATION

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Damascus Baptist Church Arbor

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER End of dirt lane, 0.1 mile SW of jct. of SR 1581 and SR 1582, 0.6 mile W of jct. with NC 115
CITY, TOWN
STATE North Carolina

CODE 037
COUNTY Iredell
CODE 097

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT
X BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
 SITE
 OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
X PUBLIC
X PRIVATE
 BOTH

STATUS
X OCCUPIED
 UNOCCUPIED
 WORK IN PROGRESS
 ACCESSIBLE
 YES RESTRICTED
 YES UNRESTRICTED
 NO

PRESENT USE
X AGRICULTURE
COMMERICAL
EDUCATIONAL
ENTERTAINMENT
X RELIGIOUS
GOVERNMENT
INDUSTRIAL
MILITARY
TRANSPORTATION
 OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME Damascus Baptist Church
c/o Rev. Irvin L. Wallace

STREET & NUMBER
Route 2
CITY, TOWN Harmony

STATE North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

6 FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE
Laura A. W. Phillips (Winston-Salem)

ORGANIZATION
Consultant for Survey and Planning Branch

DATE
February 4, 1980

TELEPHONE
(919) 733-6545

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh

STATE North Carolina
Damascus Baptist Church Arbor, in rural northwest Iredell County, is located in a picturesque setting near the crest of a hill above Snow Creek with mountains in the near distance. The arbor is part of a complex which also includes an early twentieth century frame church, a mid-twentieth century education building, and a cemetery dating from the mid-nineteenth century.

The arbor is the main focus of historical interest. Built in 1855, it is a rectangular, open structure approximately 35' X 55' with hand hewn, pegged frame, log rafters, fairly new metal roof, and dirt floor. The gable-on-hip roof has weatherboarded gable ends, one of which has "1855" painted on it. The support posts of the arbor rest on fieldstones. At the west end of the arbor is the pulpit on a slightly elevated platform. Two steps lead up to the platform on either side. The front and sides of the pulpit have a weatherboarded skirt, and the rear is shielded by a weatherboarded panel the width of the platform which runs from ground to roofline. The pulpit is on the downhill side of the arbor, which may have been planned to allow for a natural rise in the seating which spreads out on three sides in front of the pulpit. The wooden pews presently in the arbor are circular sawn and appear to date from the late Victorian period.

The church, which was built between 1907 and 1909, is situated east of the arbor. It is a plain, 1 X 4-bay gable-end-front building with louver-shuttered side windows. In recent years the interior was remodelled, a narthex was added to the front, and an addition was built at the rear, but otherwise the original form of the church fits the pattern of simple rural frame churches built in the Piedmont throughout most of the nineteenth century. During the mid-twentieth century a one-story red brick education building was constructed and attach by a corridor to the west side of the church.

The cemetery is located on the open hillside southwest of the arbor. It contains around 200 markers laid out in straight rows with no artificial boundary. The oldest markers are fieldstones, most of which are uninscribed. Those that are inscribed, however, reveal that the cemetery dates from at least 1857.

The entire Damascus complex is well maintained.
The Damascus Arbor, built in 1855 of heavy-timber pegged construction, ranks with Bethesda, Centre and Bethany Presbyterian Churches in being one of the oldest remaining religious structures in Iredell County. But unlike these other churches, the Damascus Arbor is representative of a specialized form of religious structure built during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Piedmont North Carolina. Arbors were used by congregations until more permanent structures could be erected and/or as a center for revivals, camp meetings or other special services and church-related functions. The once common arbor greatly diminished in number through the years, so that in Iredell County, Damascus Arbor is one of the very few remaining and is certainly the oldest example of this architectural type.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. The Damascus Arbor is associated with the spread of organized religion in the North Carolina Piedmont region developing out of the Great Revival which hit the area in the early nineteenth century. It is representative of the religious structural form—the permanent wood arbor—which became a socio-religious institution during the nineteenth century (and lasted well into the twentieth century in some instances).

C. The Damascus Arbor is an excellent and rare example of the mid-nineteenth century religious arbor. Through both its open design and heavy-timber pegged construction, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of this specialized architectural form.
On May 11, 1839, a meeting was held at Damascus Meeting House "in order to constitute the following members in a regular Baptist Church." This was the official beginning of Damascus Baptist Church, and according to present-day member Mary King, the church and cemetery were originally located across Snow Creek from the present complex.

In February, 1842, William Garner was unanimously called as minister of the church. Early records of the church reveal that it wielded strong control over the conduct of its members. Even Rev. Garner himself was once brought to the bar of the church for attending a Sons of Temperance banquet. (While the Baptists believed in temperance, they were opposed to all secret organizations, presumably on the grounds that there was no place in their lives for any other organization than the Baptist Church.) While the members accepted Garner's promise to never again do such a thing, they did not at that time re-elect him as pastor.

In November, 1853, the church "appointed managers to form and construct an arbour." Shortly thereafter, in February of 1854, William Garner was re-elected as pastor and called a meeting "for laying the church land into a square and to appoint trustees for the same... agreed that Wm. Brotherton should have the deed recorded." These early records imply that the church was in the process of purchasing the present site and that at the same time the arbor was being planned. The construction techniques utilized in the Damascus Arbor do not contradict the 1855 date which is painted on one of the gables.

Permanent wood arbors like the one at Damascus--always open sided--were an outgrowth of the brush arbor, a temporary shelter constructed of leaves, branches, and pine boughs suspended from tripods. Arbors, used both as places for religious meetings before churches could be erected and in many instances as sites for camp meetings or revivals, once dotted the countryside of the Piedmont region, becoming a socio-religious institution in themselves.

Although through the years Damascus Baptist Church has had several church buildings, it has continued to use its arbor in some capacity. Between 1907 and 1909 the present church building was erected east of the arbor, and during the mid-twentieth century, additions were added to the front and rear of this structure and a separate education building was constructed just west of the church and connected to it by a corridor. In recent years the congregation has acquired a site in the nearby mountains for revivals and retreats. Because of these other facilities of the church, the arbor is no longer used for worship services. Yet it is still well maintained by the congregation and used for fellowship suppers after special church services.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1 Transcript of Damascus Baptist Church Records in the Homer Keever Files, James Iredell Room, Iredell County Public Library, Statesville, N.C. Hereinafter referred to as Transcript.

2 Ruth Little-Stokes, Inventory form for Damascus Baptist Church, Iredell County Historic Inventory, 1977.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY</th>
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A | 1.7 | B | 0 | 1.0 | 9 | 3.0 |
C | 3.9 | 7 | 6 | 4.8 | 0

ZONE EASTING NORTING

D | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 2 |

ZONE EASTING NORTING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All of Tract 31, Block A, Map 14 K, Sharpsburg Township, as outlined in red on map.

The property being nominated consists of the Arbor, the associated Damascus Baptist Church buildings and cemetery and their immediate surroundings.
Footnotes (Cont'd)

3 Transcript.


5 Transcript.

6 Ibid.


8 Statesville Landmark, October 18, 1907, excerpt in the Homer Reever Files, James Iredell Room, Iredell County Public Library, Statesville, N.C.; Pearl Goodin Sloan, "Sharpsburg Township," in Iredell County Landmarks, compiled by Virginia Fraser Evans (Statesville: The Iredell County American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1976), p. 86.

9 Laura A. W. Phillips, interview with Damascus Baptist Church members at the church July 17, 1979.
Damascus Baptist Church Arbor
SW of Jct. SR 1581 & SR 1582
Central vic.
Iredell Co., Central Quad
Scale 1:24000, 4 acres
UTM References: Zone 17
Easting 501930 Northing 3976480