

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic St. John's Episcopal Church

and/or common

2. Location

street & number SE corner SR 1917 and SR 1753 \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town St. John's \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state North Carolina code 037 county Pitt code 147

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

street & number 600 Plaza Blvd.

city, town Kinston \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state North Carolina 28501

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pitt County Courthouse

street & number Third and Evans streets

city, town Greenville state North Carolina 27858

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title n/a has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state

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## 7. Description

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

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

Long a local landmark, St. John's Episcopal Church is located in the southern Pitt County community of St. Johns. Still very much a rural agricultural area, this community has come to officially bear the church's name within the last fifty years. The church was constructed in 1893-95 on the site of an earlier (ca. 1871-73) building that burned in 1892. Its cornerstone bears the date "Jan. 19, 1893" and local tradition maintains that Stephen Gus Barrington (1870-1935), an area farmer, was the builder.

The St. Johns community has maintained its rural atmosphere and a number of ante-bellum and late nineteenth century structures survive throughout the countryside. After the tumultuous Civil War years, the area apparently prospered as evidenced by the post-Civil War buildings that were constructed including the Salem Christian Church (ca. 1876), the Laurie John Chapman House (ca. 1888), and the Stephen Gus Barrington House (ca. 1890). Salem Christian Church, associated with the Disciples of Christ denomination, was organized in 1876. This one-story gable-front church with paired entrances is the only other surviving late nineteenth century one in the vicinity of St. John's Episcopal Church. The Barrington House, home of Stephen Gus Barrington to whom the construction of St. John's Episcopal Church is attributed, is a modest one-story frame house built on an L-plan with the typical gable end cornices and returns. Barrington was a member of St. John's.

St. John's Episcopal Church, a frame one-story structure, follows the traditional gable-front form. Like other rural nineteenth century Pitt County churches, St. John's is one bay wide and three bays deep with an apse on the rear (south) elevation. However, the vestibule on the facade (north elevation) is an uncommon feature. Its exterior walls are protected by weatherboards and the building rests upon brick piers now infilled. A steeply pitched gable roof covered with standing seam metal shelters the main block, vestibule and apse. A bold box cornice and returns above a wide frieze board accent the eaves.

Through the vestibule, access is gained to the interior. Handsome paneled double-leaf doors open into the vestibule and were a gift from a parishioner at the time of the building's construction. Reflecting changing building traditions, the entrance doors are hand planed with pegged rails and stiles whereas most of the interior woodwork is mechanically planed. Above the entry, a pointed arch louvered air vent punctuates the vestibule's gable front. Modern brick steps and iron railings lead to the entry. On each of the vestibule's side elevations is a single lancet window filled with stained glass. At the rear elevation, the apse mimics the vestibule's form. Stained glass lancet windows pierce a side and a rear wall, and a small shed-roofed vestry room is attached to the east elevation.

The interior follows a center-aisle plan and retains virtually all of its original woodwork including its finish. The interior walls of the vestibule, nave and apse feature a high wainscot of narrow tongue-and-groove boards, applied vertically. Formerly the walls were plastered but are now sheetrocked. Especially significant are the barrel vaulted ceilings of the vestibule, nave and apse. Sheathed with narrow tongue-and-groove boards, these ceilings are unique in an area where flat ceilings were the norm for churches. Two metal connecting rods span the ceiling of the nave. The

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lower arches of the vestibule and apse ceilings mirror the form of the nave. The stained glass memorial windows of the nave were installed ca. 1960.

Interior furnishings date from various periods. Most notable are the pews and the altar which were removed from the earlier building as it burned. The sturdy wooden altar rail is pegged and chamfered.

Adjacent to the altar area is the vestry room. This little room has plaster walls and a flat ceiling. It contains several interesting pieces of furniture including a roughly finished cabinet used for storing altar covers. Both two-panel Greek Revival doors in this room have been reused either from the earlier church or another building as indicated by lock and hinge ghost marks.

Originally the interior of the church was heated by two stoves that were vented through flue holes in the ceiling--one at the front of the sanctuary and the other at the rear. These chimney stacks were removed and replaced with the present exterior one on the east elevation. Interior light fixtures date from the early twentieth century.

Near the church is the Rountree Building, a one-story three bay by three bay cinderblock structure built ca. 1958 to house Sunday School rooms. A large cemetery with some notable tombstones ranging in dates from 1865 to the present surrounds the church on three sides. In early 1985, St. John's underwent a very sensitive rehabilitation and is in excellent condition. The church continues to serve an active congregation. St. John's parishioners take great pride in their church and are sincerely interested in its preservation.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1893-95                      **Builder/Architect** Stephen Gus Barrington

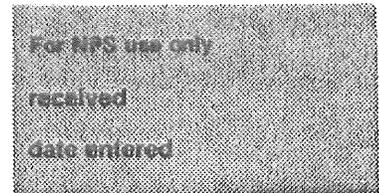
**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

St. John's Episcopal Church exemplifies the typical gable-front form favored by conservative denominations throughout North Carolina during the last half of the nineteenth century. Of frame construction, the church features an impressive barrel vaulted ceiling on the interior and is further distinguished by a projecting vestibule, an apse and a bold box cornice with cornice returns on the gable ends. St. John's is situated in the rural Pitt County community that takes its name from the church--St. John's. The congregation dates from 1821 and was formally organized in 1845, while the present church building, the second, dates from 1893-95. St. John's is the oldest Episcopal Congregation in Pitt County. Around 1919 St. John's became the mother church of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Grifton and St. James Episcopal Church in Ayden. St. John's is highly representative of late nineteenth century churches built in rural settings which served and continue to serve as the religious and social centers of their communities.

Criteria Assessment

- C. One of a very few remaining fully intact late nineteenth century churches in Pitt County, the St. John's Episcopal Church embodies the distinctive characteristics of church buildings constructed during this period in small towns and rural areas throughout eastern North Carolina. Traditionally the focal point of a largely rural community, the single gable-front church is enhanced on the exterior by a rear apse and similar gable-front vestibule and on the interior by a center-aisle plan and impressive barrel vaulted ceiling. The church is complemented by a large surrounding cemetery.

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St. John's Episcopal Church, the only building ever constructed for an Episcopal congregation in Pitt County's rural countryside, well exemplifies the vernacular gable-front church form popular in rural eastern North Carolina during the late nineteenth century. The church is situated at the junction of two early roads in the southern Pitt County community of St. Johns. This little community developed around the church and has taken the church's name only within the last fifty years. Organized in 1845, St. John's is the oldest Episcopal congregation in the county. The present church building is the second on site. It was built between 1893 and 1895 to replace the first structure which was destroyed by fire in 1892.

St. John's traces itself to an earlier congregation, Grace Chapel, which was founded in 1821. This congregation met in a nondenominational community church building also known as Grace Chapel which was sometimes referred to as Pugh's Chapel or Fellows Chapel. It was used by<sup>1</sup> the Free Will Baptists and the Disciples of Christ as well as the Episcopalians. Although services were probably held irregularly, this Episcopal congregation continued to exist until the church was formally organized as St. John's Parish and admitted to the Diocese of North Carolina in May of 1845.<sup>2</sup>

The first rector of the newly created parish was N. Collin Hughes, a position he held until 1856. For over two decades St. John's met at Grace Chapel. Under the leadership of Hughes and his immediate successors S. S. Barber and S. W. Kennerly the congregation grew steadily. Attempts to build a church were made as early as 1864 but the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction slowed these efforts. A building committee was appointed in 1871 and by 1873 a church was constructed. Kennerly and Nathaniel Harding were rectors during this period.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally, the economy of this area was based on agriculture. In North Carolina, agriculture recovered quickly after the Civil War. Later during the late nineteenth century, cotton and tobacco were the leading crops in eastern North Carolina.<sup>4</sup> Gradually tobacco took the lead, and after 1920 it was the largest single source of farm income in the state.<sup>5</sup> Following these trends, the farmers of the St. Johns area relied heavily upon cotton and tobacco and later solely upon tobacco as their main cash crops. Agriculture was the lifeblood of this community and "in the years that the crops were poor the [St. John's] parish suffered for lack of funds but in years of plenty the people gave freely."<sup>6</sup>

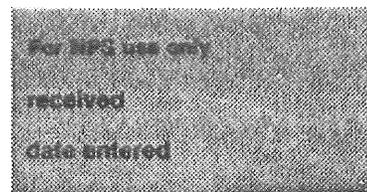
This first church served the congregation until October 9, 1892 when it was destroyed by a fire which began in the ceiling and spread quickly. The fire occurred during a service and the congregation was able to save much of the furniture, pews, doors, windows and papers. The congregation, which consisted of 65 communicants in 1892, quickly made a decision to rebuild.<sup>7</sup>

Construction of the new church took place between 1893 and 1895. According to local tradition this construction was overseen by local farmer Stephen Gus Barrington. The new church was consecrated in December of 1895. The rector at that time was Alban Greaves. The church has remained relatively unchanged since then, although a new floor was added in 1904 and the vestry room has since been expanded.<sup>8</sup>

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In 1919 St. John's and several other Episcopal churches in the area made a successful effort to acquire a resident minister by providing a rectory and 24 acres in the community. Shortly afterwards a mission was established in nearby Grifton, which later became St. Mark's Episcopal Church. St. John's and St. Mark's continue to share rectors and conduct services on alternate Sundays.<sup>9</sup>

The St. John's cemetery was opened in 1883 with the first burial taking place the next year. The cemetery was expanded in 1897, 1902, and 1915, and contains over 150 graves.<sup>10</sup>

St. John's remains an active, healthy congregation. According to church records 27 rectors have served the congregation. Those of particularly long tenure not already mentioned include John W. Griffith, Jr., R. A. Watson, Howard Alligood and J. R. Rountree, who appears to have had the longest stay. The present rector is Kenneth Townsend. For a brief period the church was under the charge of Alexander C. D. Noe, one of the four Noe brothers to become Episcopal ministers. After his retirement Rev. Noe helped restore the historic St. Thomas Episcopal Church at Bath, the oldest extant church building in North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

St. John's is representative of the rural nineteenth century churches that were so important to their communities throughout Pitt County and the state. Unlike others it has remained so. Its cemetery is one of the largest in that part of the county and contains the remains of many of the community's more prominent citizens. St. John's was the mother church of both St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Grifton and St. James Episcopal Church in Ayden, both of whom shared rectors with the older church. For almost a century and a half St. John's has remained a religious and social center of southern Pitt County.

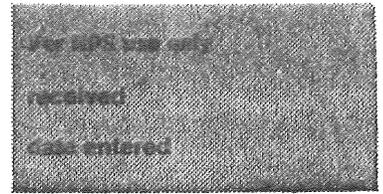
NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Information supplied by Dr. Lawrence F. Brewster, Historiographer of the Diocese of East Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. Norvin C. Duncan, Pictorial History of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina (Asheville: The Author, 1965), 47-48, hereinafter cited as Duncan, Pictorial History. The original trustees of St. John's in 1845 were Jesse Noble, Lewis Pugh, William Pugh, Bryan Kilpatrick, Frederick Johnson, Joel Patrick, John H. Burney, and Allen Patrick. St. John's is presently in the Diocese of East Carolina, which was formed in 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Duncan, Pictorial History, 47-48; Information supplied by Joseph F. Price, Vestry Clerk of St. John's Episcopal Church, hereinafter cited as Information supplied by Price; St. John's Episcopal Church Parish Register and Vestry Minutes, hereinafter cited as St. John's Parish Register; Pitt County Deed Book YY, p. 176.

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<sup>4</sup>Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, The History of a Southern State: North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 521, hereinafter cited as Lefler, North Carolina.

<sup>5</sup>Lefler, North Carolina, 577.

<sup>6</sup>Duncan, Pictorial History, 50.

<sup>7</sup>Duncan, Pictorial History, 48; St. John's Parish Register.

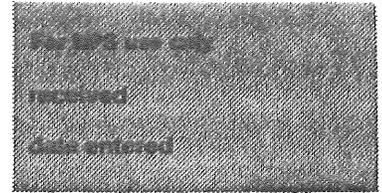
<sup>8</sup>Duncan, Pictorial History, 48; Information supplied by Price.

<sup>9</sup>Duncan, Pictorial History, 48; Elizabeth Copeland (ed.), Chronicles of Pitt County (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company with the Pitt County Historical Society, 1982), 120, hereinafter cited as Copeland (ed.), Chronicles of Pitt County.

<sup>10</sup>Information supplied by Price; Jeanette Cox St. Amand, Pitt County Gravestone Records (Greenville: The Author, 1960, four volumes), Volume 1, pp. 35-42. There are several graves in the St. John's cemetery that predate 1884. It is assumed that these were moved to St. John's at a later date.

<sup>11</sup>Information supplied by Price; St. John's Parish Register; Duncan, Pictorial History, 26-27; Copeland (ed.), Chronicles of Pitt County.

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Continuation sheet Bibliographical references Item number 9

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Information supplied by.

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Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Albert Ray Newsome. The History of a Southern State:  
North Carolina. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

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Price, Joseph F. Vestry Clerk of St. John's Episcopal Church. Information  
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St. Amand, Jeanette Cox. Pitt County Gravestone Records. Greenville: The  
author, 1960, four volumes.

St. John's Episcopal Church Parish Register and Vestry Minutes.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached bibliography.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3.21 acres

Quadrangle name Fort Barnwell, N. C. (1983)

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	2	8	5	6	1	0	3	1	9	1	6	8	2	1	0
Zone			Easting					Northing								

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The rectangular lot being nominated fronts on Pitt Co. Secondary Road 1917 and runs in depth along Secondary Road 1753. It consists of the original lot deeded in 1874 plus additions in 1897 and 1915. See attached Pitt Co. Tax Map, #537P. Nominated property outlined in red.

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

state n/a code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Description prepared by Stanley L. Little, Archives and History Assistant.  
Significance prepared by Jim L. Sumner, Researcher  
Eastern Office

organization N. C. Division of Archives and History date August 28, 1986

street & number 117 W. 5th St. telephone (919) 752-7778

city or town Greenville state North Carolina 27858

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

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

title date

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration





