

# 21

State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

Sampson COUNTY

# INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

Rosehill QUAD

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR  THEMATIC NOMINATION

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Oak Plain Presbyterian Church

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

W side SR 1943 1.1 Mi. S of SR 1945

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Waycross

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Third

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

037

COUNTY

Sampson

CODE

163

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

### PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

N/A

### STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

### ACCESSIBLE

YES RESTRICTED

YES UNRESTRICTED

NO

### PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Trustees of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church

STREET & NUMBER

c/o Mrs. J. J. Wells P.O. Box 525

CITY, TOWN

Kerensville

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 28349

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Sampson County Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Sampson County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Clinton

STATE

North Carolina 28328

## 6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Thomas Butchko

Jim Sumner, Researcher

ORGANIZATION

Survey & Planning Branch

Research Branch

DATE

June 6, 1985

STREET & NUMBER

109 East Jones Street

TELEPHONE

(919) 733-6545

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh,

STATE

North Carolina 27611

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Oak Plain Presbyterian Church is a handsome, diminutive example of the temple form of the Greek Revival style that was so popular among late antebellum churches in southeastern North Carolina. Construction began soon after the organization of the congregation on July 2, 1859,<sup>1</sup> with dedication services being held on July 4, 1860.<sup>2</sup> Church tradition states that John Fred Taylor of nearby Duplin County and William K. Chesnutt (See #54 in the Sampson book) of the vicinity, both builders, were in charge of the construction.<sup>3</sup> The unaltered building stands in a lovely grove of live oaks in the southeastern part of Sampson County, adjacent to the line with Duplin County. At the rear of the church building is a cement block educational building which was erected in 1948-1949. The rear of the property contains the cemetery with representative gravestones from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The frame, one-story, three-bay-by-three bay edifice is austere finished in the Greek Revival style. The (northeast) facade has a pedimented gable with plainly-finished boxed eaves. Simple flat pilasters rise (from neither bases nor bottomboards) at the corners of the building and support with simply-molded Doric capitals a wide frieze that continues around the building. The facade is composed of a central entrance containing a double-leaf door of four panels each and a three pane transom, all enframed by simple pilasters. Flanking the entrance are triple hung twelve-over-twelve-over-twelve sash windows in flat, two-part Greek Revival surrounds. These same surrounds are seen on many of the surviving Greek Revival houses in the county. Identical window arrangements occupy the three side bays of each elevation. In 1955 or 1956 simple colored marble glass panes replaced the original clear panes.<sup>4</sup> At the front of each of the side elevations is a four-panel door leading to the full-width vestibule. These doors, no longer used, provided a separate and more direct access to the former slave gallery.<sup>5</sup> Crowning the northeastern facade is the three-tier bell tower that was erected in 1976 as a memorial to David S. Williams, Sr.<sup>6</sup> The well-designed tower features sheaf-of-wheat railing on each of the four elevations (a continuation of the gallery balustrade) and a short, octagonal spire that rises from a cross-pedimented roof. Robert B. Herring of Rose Hill was the builder of the steeple.<sup>7</sup> In 1948-1949 a two-story, cement block educational building was erected at the rear (southwest) of the sanctuary. The four bay-by-two-bay, gable roofed building, placed transversely to the sanctuary, is finished so as to be as unobtrusive as possible. John Rogers of magnolia was the contractor.<sup>8</sup>

Entry into the sanctuary is gained through a transverse hall that extends the full width of the building. Located in each of the front corners is an enclosed stair that rises to the gallery. A central double door provides access to the sanctuary's central aisle and a single door leads to each of the side aisles.

The handsome galleried sanctuary continues in the simple, austere finished Greek Revival tradition of several late antebellum churches in southeastern North Carolina, most notably Black River Presbyterian (1859, Ivanhoe vicinity, Sampson County). In size it most closely resembles the delightful Elizabeth United Methodist Church (ca 1853, Cleveland Township, Johnston County). The impressive gallery that extends across the northeast facade and down the side elevations is carried by paneled plank posts that are

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decorated by cut-out, pointed arches that continue the modest gothic motif introduced at the pulpit. Handsomely molded Doric capitals crown the pillars. The well-executed balustrade that encloses the gallery is the most extensive use of the sheaf-of-wheat motif in Sampson County. The raised chancel area is centrally placed along the southwest wall and is flanked by twelve-over-twelve-over-twelve sash windows which now open into the stairwell of the rear educational unit. This chancel area is enclosed by a closed railing with sheaf-of-wheat motif and focuses upon the central pulpit which has an intricate Gothic-arched panel flanked by turned pilasters which support the lectern. The altar table stands in front of the pulpit. Completing the sanctuary are the same two-part moldings as on the exterior, the original wide plank, heart pine pews on both levels, a single four-panel door located in the southwest wall under each end of the gallery that originally led to the exterior but now leads to the educational building, and a handsome octagonal baptismal font which continues the Gothic motif of the pulpit.

The educational building contains a large fellowship hall and kitchen on the first story and four classrooms and two bathrooms on the second story. Access to the second story is by a pair of stairs that rise along the wall adjacent to the sanctuary.

The cleared grounds of the church, covering approximately two-and-one-third of the six acres owned by the church (the rest is wooded), contains the cemetery at the rear and a tree-shaded lawn area in the front. The oldest part of the cemetery is directly behind the educational building and is enclosed by a low fence comprised of a series of cast concrete pylons that are connected with metal pipes. Buried in this section are numerous members of the Newkirk family, who have been active in the church's affairs since its early years.<sup>9</sup> Other locally prominent family names represented here include Murphy, Wells, Williams, Byrd, and Bonum.<sup>10</sup> The cemetery, which contains representative tombstones from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is nicely landscaped and features an allee of Southern magnolias, approximately fifteen to twenty years old, which shade a portion of the unpaved drive which extends through the cemetery. Brick pylon gates mark the entrances to the cemetery. The numerous oak and pine trees which shade the front of the grounds not only provide a lovely setting for the rural church, but also provide for shaded parking. A handsome row of ten live oak trees (unfortunately trimmed because of overhead power lines) were planted along Secondary Route 1943 about thirty-five years ago and very appropriately frame the Oak Plain Presbyterian Church.

There are two contributing elements to the nomination of the Oak Plain Presbyterian Church: the church and the cemetery.

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FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church, 1859-1959", Rose Hill, North Carolina, 1959, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., Also interivew with Ben V. Byrd, church elder, on September 8, 1984.

<sup>4</sup>Rev. Jack Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church, 1859-1984", p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Although church tradition maintains that the gallery was added after the Civil War, this seems highly unlikely and would be very much out of tradition to the similar antebellum churches in the state.

<sup>6</sup>Dail, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>Byrd interview, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Dail, op. cit., p. 17 and Byrd interivew.

<sup>9</sup>According to Ben V. Byrd, the Newkirks, a pioneer family in the Newton's Crossroad vicinity of Sampson County (See entries 16, 17, and 18 in the Sampson Inventory book), were kicked out of the Baptist church for dancing and moved their membership to the Oak Plain congregation.

<sup>10</sup>See attached cemetery inventory from Leora Hiatt McEachern, Gravestone Records, Volume VI, Sampson and Bladen Counties, Wilimington, North Carolina, 1977, pp. 17-26.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL

\_\_\_\_ STATE

XX LOCAL

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 checked="" 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

1859/60

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Oak Plain Presbyterian Church, the original structure of the Oak Plain congregation which was organized on July 2, 1859, was built in 1859-1860 and is a handsome, small-scale version of the impressive Greek Revival church buildings that were erected toward the close of the antebellum period by prosperous congregations throughout southeastern North Carolina. Its front gable form and austere detailing follows a diminutive form of such impressive edifices as Black River Presbyterian Church (\_\_\_\_, Elizabethtown vicinity, Bladen County), Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church (1859, NR, Laurel Hill Township, Scotland County), and Bethel Presbyterian Church (\_\_\_\_, Aberdeen vicinity, Hoke County). It is perhaps most similar in size and form to the Elizabeth United Methodist Church, ca 1853, in Cleveland Township, Johnston County. The handsome interior of the Oak Plain church features a second level gallery enclosed by fine sheaf-of-wheat railing, the most extensive uses of this motif in the county. The original interior furniture survives. Completing the peaceful, tree-shaded rural site is the church cemetery, which contains graves of over 225 church members including several founding members and one of the builders of the church, W. K. Chesnutt.

## CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- A. is associated with the settlement and development of rural southeastern North Carolina, and with the planter economy and society of that region of the state.
- B. is associated with the locally prominent Chesnutt family, a prominent ante bellum planter family.
- C. embodies the ante bellum Greek Revival style of architecture both in the exterior and interior finish. The interior features the original furnishings and second floor gallery.
- D. Although no investigation has been done, the site is likely to yield archaeological information important to the understanding of the region's history.

Exception:

- A. The Oak Plain Presbyterian Church is a handsome Greek Revival antebellum church which embodies traditional form and style, and remains in an unaltered state.
- D. The Cemetery is being nominated because of its proximity to the church, its age, and its local importance to the church and its congregation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Oak Plain Presbyterian Church is located in the eastern part of Sampson County near the small community of Waycross. The church was founded in 1859, with the main church building constructed the next year.

In April of 1859, the Fayetteville Presbytery entertained and approved a petition to form a church that would become Oak Plain. The church committee met in Bryan's Church in July of that year and formally organized a congregation. The church had nineteen members, about half of whom were relatives or servants of Patrick Murphy, one of Sampson County's leading citizens. Murphy (1801-1874) was a planter, a lawyer, and a lay leader in the church. Prior to the establishment of Oak Plains, he was an elder in the South River Presbyterian Church and helped organize the Shiloh Presbyterian Church (later Graves Memorial) in Clinton in 1831. Murphy represented New Hanover County in the General Assembly in 1829 and Sampson County in 1846 and 1865. Murphy and Jacob Wells were elected Ruling Elders, James Treadwell was elected deacon, and Murphy was elected clerk of the church at its organizational meetings. Another prominent charter member of the congregation was James H. Lamb, one of Sampson County's prominent planters.

The Reverend George Gibbs became the first pastor of the church. The main church building was completed and dedicated in the summer of 1860 on land given the church by the Murphy family. The early growth of the church was retarded by the Civil War and subsequent reconstruction and also by the 1866 organization of a Presbyterian church in nearby Springvale. However, Oak Plain was still able to host the meeting of the Fayetteville Presbytery in 1866.

Oak Plain's growth continued to be modest under a succession of ministers. Gibbs was replaced in 1864 by Benjamin Marable who served until 1869. He was followed by Alexander Kirkland, 1870-1882; and Colin Shaw, 1882-1896. Supply ministers served the church from 1896 until 1901 when Robert W. Mann became pastor. Mann stayed until 1907 and was followed by P. L. Clark, 1907-1912; James Thomas, 1913-1918; W. F. Hollingsworth, 1918-1921; George Oldham, 1921-1926; Samuel Harness, 1926-1942; Frank Bain, 1943-1951; Wade Allison, 1951-1955; Robert J. Wilkins, 1955-1962; W. Clark Porter III, 1967-1981; and Edward Moore, 1982-1984. The congregation reached its largest size, approximately 85, under the pastorate of Reverend Mann in the early part of the century. A number of pastors during the middle part of the twentieth century were shared with other churches, such as Grove Church in Kenansville. Present membership is about 40.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dail, Jack. "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church: 1859-1959," Unpublished typescript.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 758850 3858550
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
c

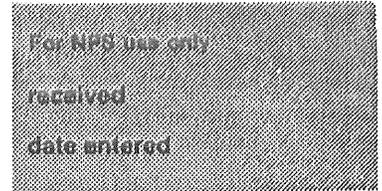
B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property being nominated consists of the church site and cemetery, approximately 300' x 250'. Site plan is enclosed.

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The physical plant of the church was expanded in 1949 with the completion of a two-story education building. In the next few years, the education building saw the addition of a kitchen, while the main church facility saw the addition of stain glass windows and an organ. A steeple was added to the church building in 1976.<sup>4</sup>

Although modest in size, Oak Plain has served its rural area for over 125 years. Members of the congregation helped found at least two other churches, one near Springvale Academy in 1866 and the Holly Grove Presbyterian Church in 1914. Two ministers have come from the congregation, T. H. Newkirk and R. Murphy Williams, Jr. The latter is a grandson of Patrick Murphy. The church cemetery is located on the property and contains over 200 graves.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jack Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church: 1859-1984," Unpublished 5-7, hereinafter cited as Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church"; Oscar M. Bizzell (ed.), The Heritage of Sampson County, North Carolina (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company for the Sampson County Historical Society, 1983), 529-530.

<sup>2</sup>Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church," 7-11; Sampson County Deed Book 34, pp. 365, 368.

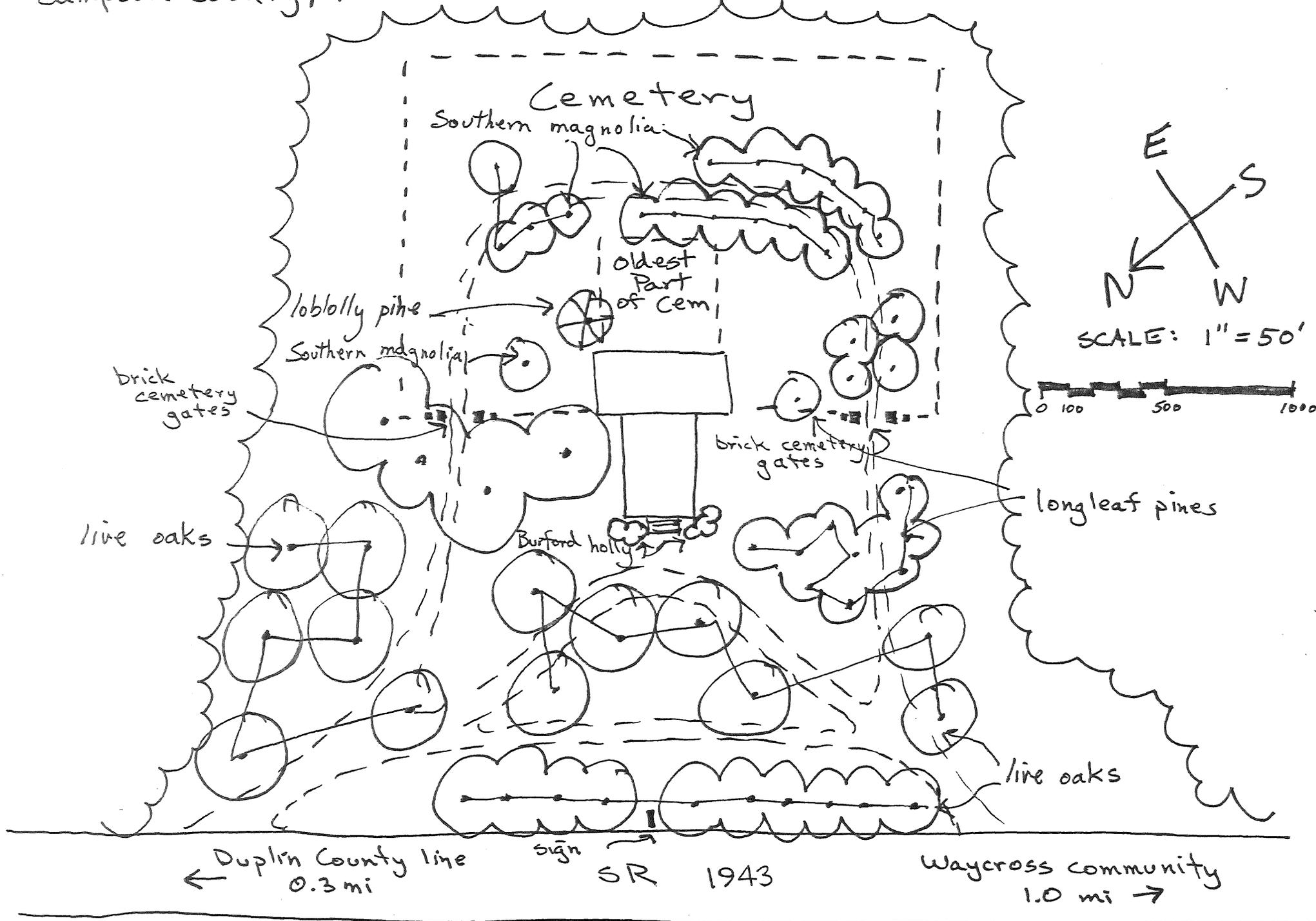
<sup>3</sup>Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church," 10-18.

<sup>4</sup>Dail, "History of Oak Plain Presbyterian Church," 14-15.

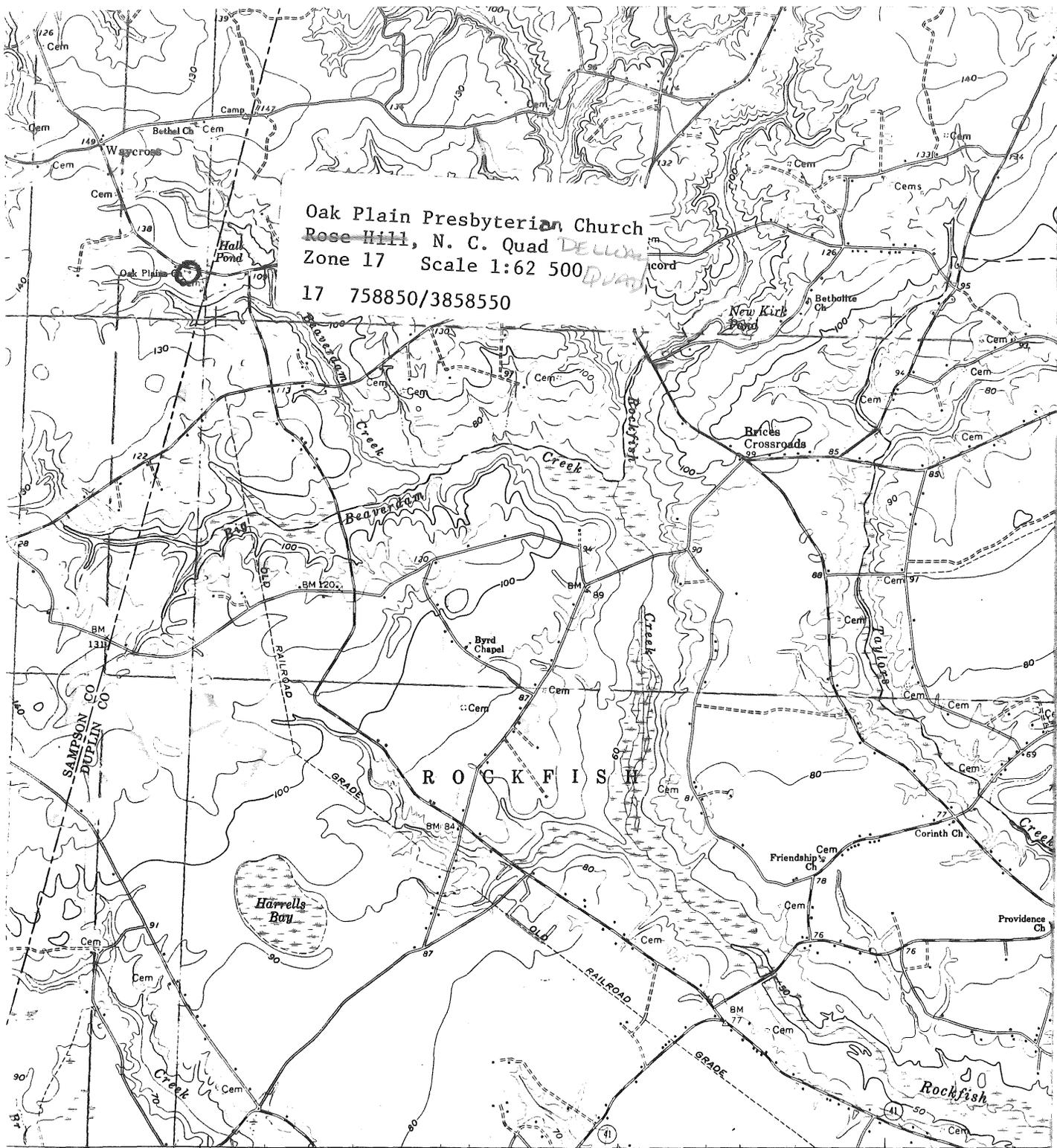
<sup>5</sup>Leora Hiatt McEachern, "Gravestone Records, Volume VI, Sampson and Bladen Counties," Unpublished, 17-26.

# WAK PLAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

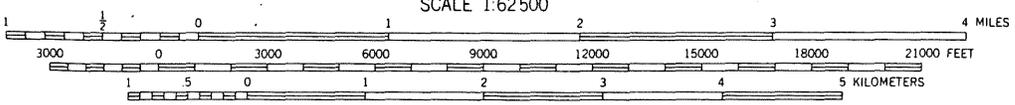
Waycross vicinity, Taylors Bridge Township,  
Sampson County, North Carolina



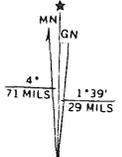
Oak Plain Presbyterian Church  
 Rose Hill, N. C. Quad DELOW  
 Zone 17 Scale 1:62 500  
 17 758850/3858550



C. 411.8 MI. 758 759 10' 760 761 762 (ATKINSON) HARRELLS 5 MI. 765 766 5' WALLACE 4  
 5353 II ELIZABETHTOWN 29 MI.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL



1950 AND 1962 MAGNETIC NORTH  
 DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

DELOW QUAD

