INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

Historic Resources of Wilkesboro (Partial Inventory: Historic and Architectural Properties)

X MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR THEMATIC NOMINATION

1 NAME

HISTORIC
St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Cemetery
AND/OR COMMON
St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Cemetery

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
North side Cowles St. between Woodland Blvd. and West Street

CITY. TOWN
Wilkesboro

STATE
North Carolina

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY
 DISTRICT _ BUILDING(S) _ STRUCTURE _ SITE _ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
 PUBLIC _ PRIVATE _ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION _ IN PROCESS _ BEING CONSIDERED _ N/A

STATUS
 X OCCUPIED _ UNOCCUPIED _ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE _ YES RESTRICTED _ YES UNRESTRICTED _ NO

PRESENT USE
 _ AGRICULTURE _ COMMERCIAL _ PARK
 _ EDUCATIONAL _ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
 _ ENTERTAINMENT _ RELIGIOUS
 _ GOVERNMENT _ SCIENTIFIC
 _ INDUSTRIAL _ TRANSPORTATION
 _ MILITARY _ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
St. Paul's Episcopal Church

STREET & NUMBER
P. O. Box 95

CITY. TOWN
Wilkesboro

STATE
North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE
Wilkes County Courthouse

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

STREET & NUMBER
Courthouse Square

CITY. TOWN
Wilkesboro

STATE
North Carolina

6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Laura A. W. Phillips, Consultant

ORGANIZATION
for Wilkesboro Historic Properties Commission

DATE
May 1980

STREET & NUMBER

CITY OR TOWN
Wilkesboro

STATE
N. C.
DESCRIPTION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Cemetery are dramatically located on the crest of a hill overlooking Wilkesboro to the south and the Yadkin River and North Wilkesboro to the northeast. St. Paul's Church, erected during 1848-1849, is a small Gothic Revival brick structure reminiscent of English medieval country parish churches and rather typical of small Episcopal churches built in America during the mid-nineteenth century. The church has an east-west orientation, with side entrance on the south, and the cemetery spreads outward from the church to the east and west.

Even in its simplicity, the exterior of St. Paul's church clearly echoes Gothic influence in its steep gable roof, corner stepped buttresses and lancet windows. The brick walls are laid in six-to-one common bond and have been repointed during recent years with a hard mortar. The entire north wall was rebuilt after being demolished by a violent windstorm in 1928. The exterior of the church is clearly divided into the four bays of the nave and the two bays of the slightly recessed chancel. A small vestry room projects from the northeast corner of the building and features a ten-panel door with three-light transom and a nine-over-six sash window. At the west end of the church is a small frame bellfry topped by a simple cross. Small but decorative sawn-work crosses are also found at the peak of each gable on the building. Other subtle exterior refinements include the stone caps on each step of the buttresses and the slightly projecting water table with vertical slits -- like those at Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church -- providing ventilation for the crawl space under the building. The church is entered through a gabled entry porch on the south side with lancet-arched portal. A recent addition to the St. Paul's complex has been the gable-roofed frame and brick "shed" located halfway up the steps to the church entrance from the street.

The Gothic Revival style of St. Paul's Church extends to the interior, where the detailing is predominantly original. The center-aisled nave leads to the more narrow chancel which is entered through a broad, lancet-arched opening. The chancel is further separated from the nave by the altar rail of turned balusters and by the fact that it is raised several feet above the nave. Most of the lancet-arched windows with deep reveals which line the plastered walls of the church have been infilled with stained glass during the mid-twentieth century. The trussed-rafter ceiling with chamfered detailing emphasizes the Gothic Feeling of the interior. Several details of the interior are of particular note. Among these are the pulpit, baptismal font, and wainscot on the east wall behind the altar, all of which have lancet-arched recessed panels grained in a sophisticated manner. Even the simple walnut pews are distinguished by their bevel-edged back panels. The lancet-arched entrance and vestry room doors add to the overall Gothic character of the church interior. The vestry room door is composed of beaded boards set in a chevron pattern and has a metal box lock, while the double-leaf entrance door has beaded boards laid vertically and features an unusual wooden box lock.

Complimenting St. Paul's Episcopal Church is the cemetery which spreads outward east and west from the building. Nineteenth and twentieth century stones of various types, e.g. vertical and horizontal slabs, crosses, vertical posts or columns, etc., are to be found in the cemetery. Some that are situated close to the west end of the church are enclosed by a delicate ironwork fence. Prominent members of such local families as the Gordons, Browns, Calloways, Barbers, Wellborns and Fergusons are buried here.
The initial formation of the Episcopal congregation in Wilkesboro in 1836 and the subsequent construction of St. Paul's Church in 1848-1849 marked a significant extension of the Protestant Episcopal Church into northwestern North Carolina. The consecration of St. Paul's was one of the earliest to occur in what is now the Diocese of Western North Carolina. From the outset the church numbered among its worshipers some of the most prominent men and women of the area, many of whom are buried in the cemetery which adjoins the church. St. Paul's is an excellent example of the mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival as interpreted in a small parish church, and after more than one and a quarter centuries remains with very few alterations.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. St. Paul's Episcopal Church is one of the few remaining buildings associated with the pre-Civil War development of the county seat town of Wilkesboro. In addition, the formation of the congregation in 1836 and the erection of the church in 1848-1849 marked a significant extension of the Protestant Episcopal Church into northwestern North Carolina, with the consecration of the church being one of the earliest to occur in what is now the Diocese of Western North Carolina.

C. Erected by local builder D. Dameron in 1848-1849, the well-preserved St. Paul's Episcopal Church embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival style as interpreted in a small brick parish church.
The beginnings of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Wilkesboro can be traced to a baptismal service of 13 September 1836 conducted by the Rt. Rev. Levi Sulliman Ives, Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina. This first service of record was held in the home of James R. Dodge, a locally prominent attorney and a nephew of Washington Irving. For more than a decade thereafter the small group of Episcopalians in Wilkesboro were visited almost every year by Bishop Ives, who during each visitation preached, baptised, and confirmed in private homes or at the Wilkes County Courthouse, there being "no building set apart for the (Episcopal) worship of God in the town."1

In the fall of 1847 a campaign was launched to raise money for a church building; and, by the end of January 1848, thirty-four individuals contributed $1,024.40. Additional contributions followed for the purchase of a bell, a chancel carpet, a Bible, and a melodeon.2 In May of 1848 a contract was awarded to one D. Dameron for the construction of the church. Work began during the following October and was completed by July of 1849.3 In his address to the diocesan convention of May 1850, Bishop Ives praised St. Paul's and its small congregation:

This is a beautiful Gothic Structure of brick, erected at small expense, with free sittings, and without debt, showing what may be effected by a few Churchmen with small means, applied under a well directed zeal.4

The church was consecrated by Bishop Ives on the morning of 8 July 1849. During that evening he confirmed twelve persons, including eight whites and four slaves. On the preceding day, at sunset, the student body and faculty from the seminary at Valle Crucis marched solemnly into Wilkesboro, bearing pilgrim's staffs and chanting the Gloria in Excelsis.5 The consecration of St. Paul's was one of the earliest to occur in what is now the Diocese of Western North Carolina.6

Ives, who was influenced by the ideas of the New York Ecclesiological Society concerning the inspirational qualities of the Gothic Revival, was a strong proponent of the style for Episcopal churches. During his tenure as bishop in North Carolina, the denomination grew and so did the interest in the Gothic Revival. Many congregations built new churches in more or less faithful renditions of the style. For some, however, the Gothic Revival smacked of Romanism. Such an impression struck William H. Battle, who wrote to Lucy M. Battle after visiting St. Paul's in Wilkesboro:
"He is a young man of decided talent...but unfortunately too fond of the novelties which have of late caused so much agitation and confusion in our church. This trait is manifested in everything he does...it has given occasion to the enemies of the Episcopal Church to charge it of having a strong tendency to Romanism....The style even of the church edifice is pointed to as proof of the allegations. It is indeed quite a quaint looking building, being the extreme of the Gothic Style with quite a sufficiency of crosses on the outside as well as within. Its site too is romantic, and to an unprejudiced eye its appearance, though picturesque, is very pleasant."  

It is worth noting that Ives did indeed eventually become a Roman Catholic, causing much anxiety and tension in the North Carolina Episcopal diocese. He left, however, a legacy of notable Gothic Revival churches scattered throughout the diocese he had administered.8

To some extent, the construction, consecration, and early history of St. Paul's Church should be viewed in relationship to the controversies surrounding Valle Crucis, forty-five miles to the west, and in relationship to the formal conversion of Bishop Ives to Roman Catholicism in December of 1852. At the very time that St. Paul's was being constructed, there were widespread suspicions that the Valle Crucis faculty, seminarians, and missionaries were dangerously inclined toward Rome in terms of doctrine, practice, and liturgy. Indeed, in his address to the diocesan convention of May 1849, Bishop Ives made reference to the resentment aroused by the Valle Crucis missionary in Wilkesboro and to the fact "that some of the members of the (Wilkesboro) Church has been made seriously to suffer in their rights as citizens, on the ground of their religious principles. . . ."9

The charter members of St. Paul's were Mr. and Mrs. James Gwyn, Dr. and Mrs. James Calloway, Miss Fannie Williams, and her sister, Mrs. Mary Taylor Peden, the widow of Captain William W. Peden and later the wife of the Rev. Richard W. Barber, who served as the minister at St. Paul's from 1851 to 1895.10 Among the congregation's membership during the early years of the church's existence were locally prominent residents of Surry as well as Wilkes County. Indeed, of the thirty persons listed as members in January of 1848, before construction of the church began, fifteen were residents of Surry County.11

St. Paul's was formally accepted as a parish by the diocesan convention of 1858. Its delegates to that convention were James R. Dodge, James Gwyn, Dr. James Calloway, and Ransom Hickerson. Delegates Gwyn, Calloway, and Hickerson also served as members of St. Paul's original vestry, together with James B. Gordon, William W. Barber, and John T. Peden.12
From the time of its construction and consecration until well into the twentieth century, St. Paul's remained a small and struggling congregation, heavily dependent upon a few relatively prosperous and loyal members for its cohesion, stability, and survival. An examination of the church records and of the parochial reports to the annual diocesan conventions reveals that baptisms, confirmations, and marriages were never numerous, especially during the period between the 1890s and the 1930s. Part of St. Paul's problem with membership resulted from the formation of other Episcopal congregations in portions of Wilkes and Surry counties which formerly had sent their worshipers to Wilkesboro. As early as 1857 Gwyn's Chapel near Ronda already had as many communicants (9) as St. Paul's. The small congregation at Ronda constructed All Saints Church in 1897. In 1898 a long-existing group of Episcopalians at Elkin at last erected their own house of worship, Galloway Memorial. It is very evident that these new churches drew away many of St. Paul's parishioners.

On 6 July 1849, only two days prior to St. Paul's consecration, title to the two-acre tract upon which the church stood was conveyed by Samuel F. Patterson to the Rt. Rev. Levi Sullivan Ives, John W. Wright, and George W. Mordecai as trustees for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of North Carolina. This deed specifically stated that the land was being given "in trust for the Congregation worshipping at St. Paul's." In addition to the church property itself, this original deed also conveyed title to a strip of land opposite the church which was for many years used as a hitching lot.

From 1820 to 1840 Samuel F. Patterson carried on a successful mercantile business in Wilkesboro. Subsequently he served as president of the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad until 1845, at which time he removed to Caldwell County and began the practice of progressive agriculture. At the time he donated the property upon which St. Paul's had been built, he was serving the second of three terms as State Senator. It is also of interest to note that Patterson's support of the Episcopal Church in western North Carolina was conspicuous in Caldwell as well as Wilkes County.

The property which Patterson had donated to the church was situated on the crest of a hill overlooking the town of Wilkesboro, the Yadkin Valley, and the Brushy and Blue Ridge Mountains. The site included a small cemetery which had apparently been used by local Episcopalians at least as early as 1838. On 2 April, 1949, almost exactly a century after being conveyed to the trustees of the Diocese of North Carolina, title to the church property was finally transferred to the wardens and vestry of St. Paul's. On 13 September 1905, largely as a result of the Woman's Auxiliary's fund-raising efforts, St. Paul's was at last able to purchase a house south of the church for use as a rectory. The
cost of this house and property was $1,250. On 19 October 1948 an addition of 2,259 square feet of land was made to the existing church property at a cost of $1,500. Ten years after this expansion of the church property, on 1 June 1958, ground was broken for the erection of a parish house. This building was finished and dedicated on 8 February 1959. During the following month land adjoining the new parish house was purchased for a parking lot. With a house of worship, a rectory, a parish house, and parking facilities, the St. Paul's properties were adequate to meet the needs of a growing congregation.

Since the annual visitations of Bishop Ives during most of the years between 1836 and 1848, the St. Paul's congregation has been served by a large number of ministers. Following his theological studies at Valle Crucis, the Rev. William R. Gries began to officiate in Wilkesboro on a regular basis in January of 1848. It was Gries who presided over the congregation during the construction of St. Paul's and who prepared the new church for consecration on 8 July of the next year. Gries was ordained to the priesthood in September of 1850 and continued to serve St. Paul's for only a short time thereafter.

St. Paul's second minister and by far its longest serving was the Rev. Richard Wainwright Barber, also a product of Valle Crucis. Barber served as a missionary at St. Paul's from 1851 to 1858, and, after its admittance as a parish, he served as rector until 1895. In addition to his pastoral duties at St. Paul's, the Rev. Barber carried on extensive mission work in Yadkin, Iredell, and Surry, as well as Wilkes County. He also conducted a private school in his home on the Yadkin and served as the superintendent of public instruction in Wilkes County for some twenty years. For more than three decades following the Rev. Barber's departure, St. Paul's was served for brief periods by various elected rectors, visiting ministers, temporary priests-in-charge, seminarians, and lay readers. There were even times when regular services in the church were suspended altogether. It was in 1911, during the brief ministry of the Rev. Theodore Andrews, that the rectory was first occupied, although the residence had been obtained six years earlier.

On 17 January 1928, while the parish was under the rectorship of the Rev. John H. Griffith, the north wall of the church was demolished during a violent windstorm. It was Griffith who marshaled the support of the small congregation and the community to repair the extensive damage. The Rev. Boston M. Lackey, Rector of St. James, Lenoir, began to officiate at St. Paul's in the fall of 1929 on Sunday afternoons and on every fifth Sunday morning. Until his resignation in December of 1950, the Rev. Lackey held the small but growing congregation together while it was yet unable to support a resident minister of its own. Following the brief ministries of the Rev. Edwin Rossmaesler and the Rev. Manuel Fowler, the present rector, the Rev. Frank E. McKenzie, assumed office on 15 March 1958.
The initial formation of the Wilkesboro congregation and the subsequent construction of St. Paul's marked a significant extension of the Protestant Episcopal Church into northwestern North Carolina. From the outset the church numbered among its worshipers some of the most prominent men and women of the area. Through long years of vicissitude and threatened extinction its congregation struggled for survival and at last began to grow and prosper. The small Gothic structure has been altered very little after more than one and a quarter centuries. It stands today not only as a significant architectural achievement, but also as the repository of a rich historical tradition and as a monument to the tenacity of the human spirit.


Ibid.


Battle Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, William H. Battle to Lucy M. Battle, March 22, 1851 from Wilkesboro.


11 St. Paul's Records, n.p. William P. Waugh, Ranson Hickerson, and James B. Gordon were among other prominent members from Wilkes County. James R. Dodge (formerly of Wilkes) and Joseph Williams were among the members from Surry County. After the formation of Yadkin County out of Surry in 1850, St. Paul's drew membership from both counties.


13 Journal of the Convention of 1857, p. 32. In the early 1850s James Gwyn had moved his family from Wilkesboro to Ronda. Gwyn's Chapel was located at or near his home.

14 St. Paul's Records, n.p. See especially the list of communicants at St. Paul's compiled in 1897. For further information on these two churches, see Sill, Historical Sketches, pp. 40-42.


16 For additional information on Patterson, see Thomas Felix Hickerson, Happy Valley: History and Genealogy (Chapel Hill: published by the author, 1940), pp. 48-49. In 1824 Patterson had erected a home in Wilkesboro near the future site of St. Paul's. In 1845 this home was purchased by James Gwyn. For a photograph of this house, see Ibid., photo section between pp. 32 and 33.

17 Work Project Administration. Pre-1914 Graves Index. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

18 Wilkes County Deeds, Book 191, pp. 609-610.

19 Ibid., Book 57, pp. 53-54. For a brief discussion of the Woman's Auxiliary (formed in 1896), see Lackey, "Centennial Address."


21 "St. Paul's Episcopal Church," Survey file, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

23 There have been other real estate transactions which have less significance in terms of the church and its associated grounds and buildings. For information concerning these, reference is made to Wilkes County Deeds, Book 123, pp. 243-244 and 260 (1922); Book 171, pp. 36-37 (1935); Book 210, pp. 50-51 (1943); Book 212, p. 142 (1943); and Book 215, pp. 112 and 113 (1947). A plat of the church grounds as of 1938 can be found in Book 132 at p. 153; but this plat was too large for inclusion in the deed books on microfilm at the Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

24 For additional information on the Rev. Gries, see Lackey, "Centennial Address."

25 For additional information on the Rev. Barber, see Lackey, "Centennial Address"; Sill, Historical Sketches, pp. 39-41; and "St. Paul's Episcopal Church, " Survey file, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.


27 Lackey, "Centennial Address"; and Jean De Journette, "Friends Toil to Restore Famous Little Church in Wilkes County," Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel, 7 October 1928.


HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(see attached Historical Significance prepared by Wilson Angley.)

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(see attached Bibliography prepared by Wilson Angley.)

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
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Wilkes County Churches. Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Wilkesboro, N.C. Record Book, 1848-1951. Microfilm in the Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

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Secondary Sources


De Journette, Jean. "Friends Toil to Restore Famous Little Church in Wilkes County." Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel, 7 October 1928.


North Wilkesboro Journal-Patriot.


"St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Wilkesboro, N.C., 1836-1961," anonymous typescript in Wilkes County Survey file, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.