PROPOSAL OF
BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1893
CHERRYVILLE TOWNSHIP
TO THE GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PROPERTIES REGISTER
FEBRUARY, 1988

GASTON COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Mrs. Richard Penegar, Chrmn.
Mr. Robert C. Carpenter
Mrs. Fred S. Cloninger
Mrs. William N. Craig
Mrs. Richard Rhyne
Mrs. William B. Shannon
Mrs. H.O. Williams
Mr. H.M. Lineberger
Mr. James F. Love, III

CONTENTS

1. Name and location of the property- Bethel Lutheran Church, 1893, at the intersection of Rudisill and Long Shoals Roads, Cherryville Township, Gaston County, North Carolina.

2. Name and address of current owner of the property- Bethel Lutheran Church attn: Charles Leavitt
Rt. 4, Box 767
Lincolnton, N.C. 28092

3. Representative photographs of the property.

4. Map depicting location of the property.

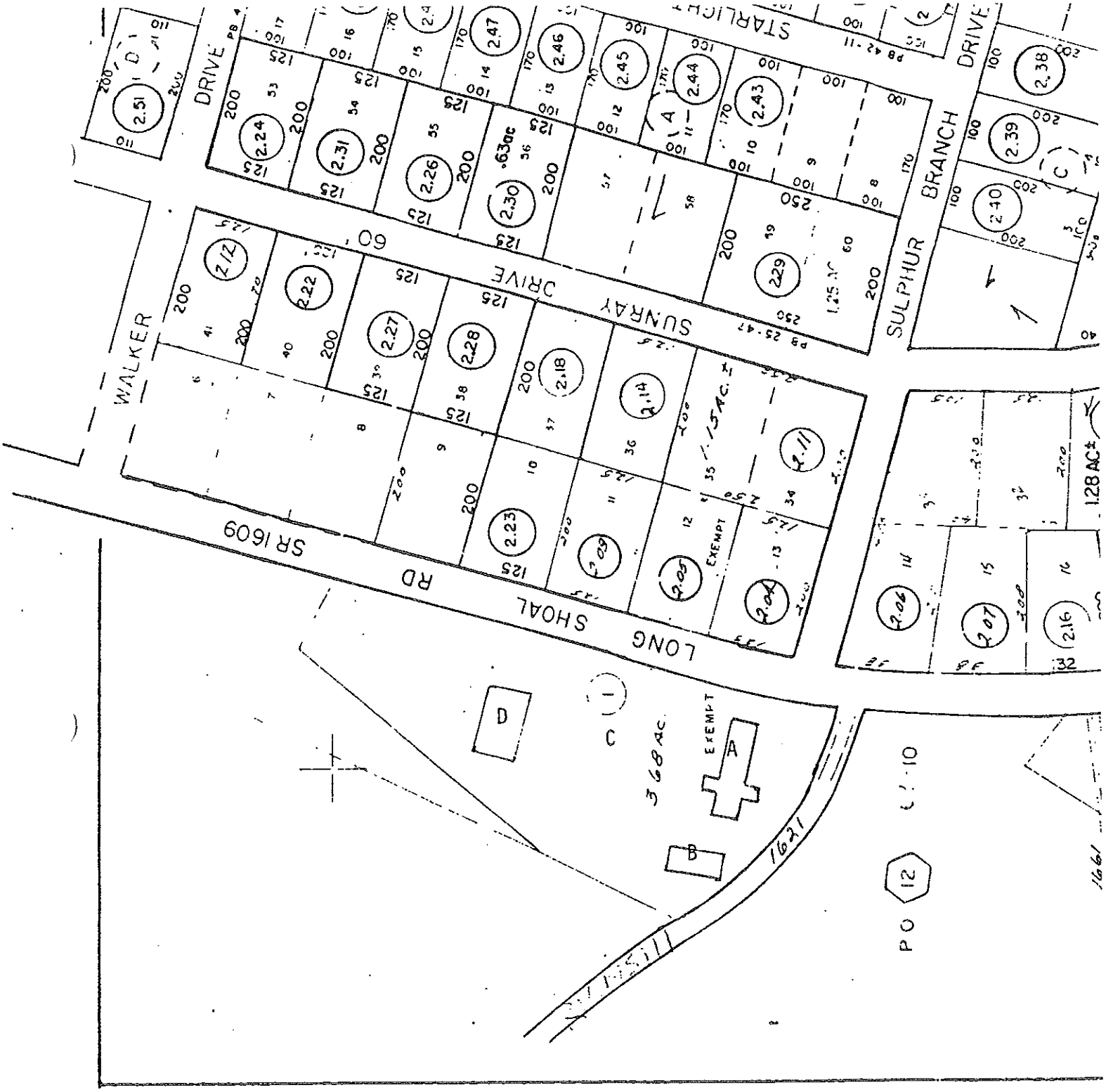
5. Current deed references of the property.

6. Historical sketch of the property. This report contains a brief historical description of the property prepared by Mr. Robert C. Carpenter, Vice-chairman of the Historic Properties Commission.

7. Architectural description of the property. This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Alan Waufle, Director of the Gaston County Museum of Art & History.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical significance to the county.

The Gaston County Historic Properties Commission believes that the Bethel Lutheran Church, 1893, is one of the oldest congregations in the county and is the oldest Lutheran brick sanctuary still being used for worship services, and is significant to the history of Gaston County.

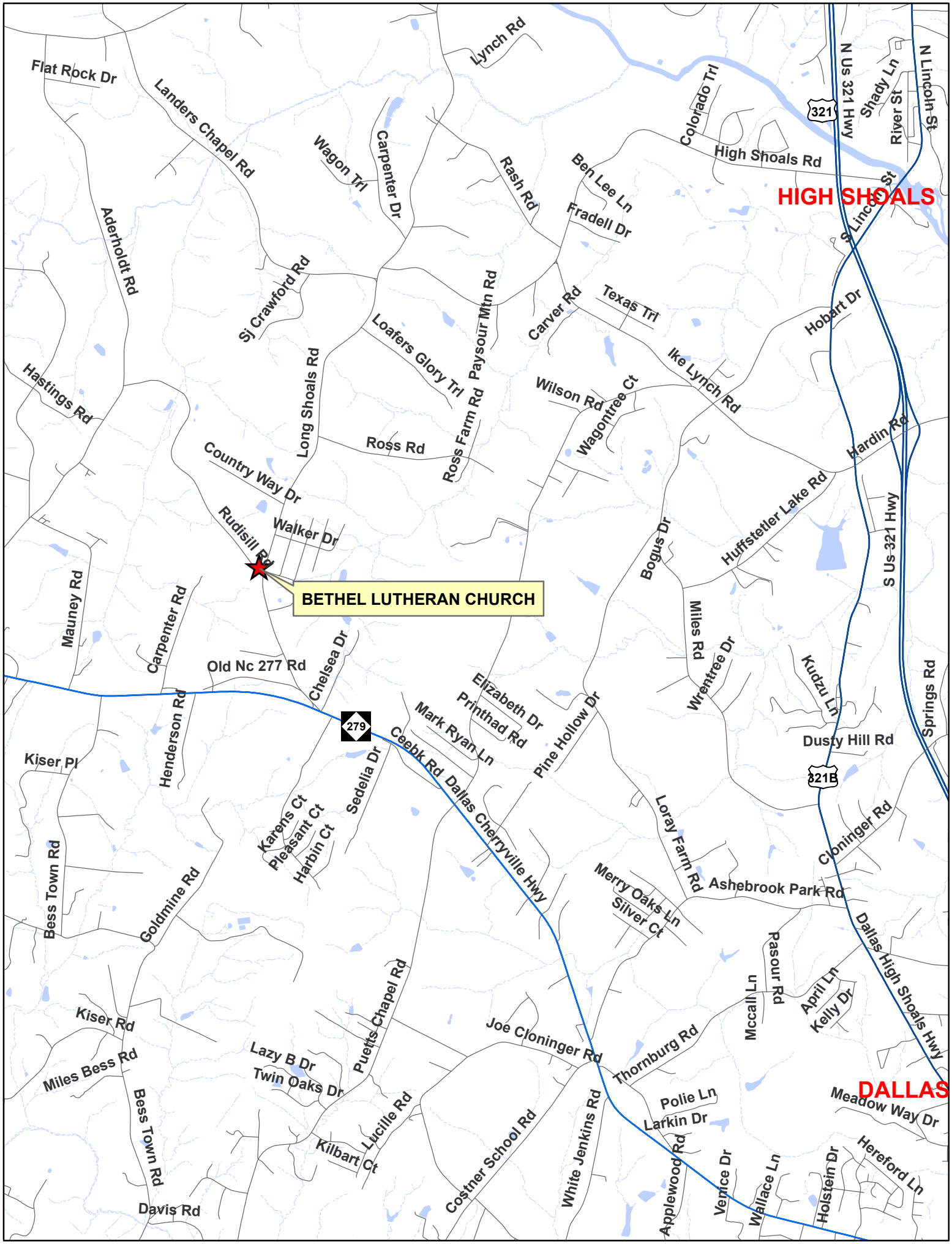


A. Church Sanctuary

B. Parish House

C. Cemetery

D. Educational Building


BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH
HIGH SHOALS
DALLAS
Flat Rock Dr
Landers Chapel Rd
Lynch Rd
Wagon Trl
Carpenter Dr
Rash Rd
Ben Lee Ln
Fradell Dr
Colorado Trl
High Shoals Rd
N Us 321 Hwy
Shady Ln
River St
N Lincoln St
S Lincoln St
Aderholdt Rd
Sj Crawford Rd
Loafers Glory Trl
Paysour Mtn Rd
Carver Rd
Texas Trl
Hobart Dr
Ike Lynch Rd
Hastings Rd
Long Shoals Rd
Wilson Rd
Wagontree Ct
Ross Farm Rd
Ross Rd
Hardin Rd
Country Way Dr
Rudisill Rd
Walker Dr
Huffstetler Lake Rd
S Us 321 Hwy
Bogus Dr
Mauney Rd
Carpenter Rd
Old Nc 277 Rd
Chelsea Dr
Miles Rd
Wrentree Dr
Kudzu Ln
Springs Rd
Elizabeth Dr
Printhad Rd
Mark Ryan Ln
Pine Hollow Dr
Dusty Hill Rd
Kiser Pl
Henderson Rd
Sedelia Dr
Ceebk Rd
Dallas Cherryville Hwy
Loray Farm Rd
Cloninger Rd
Karens Ct
Pleasant Ct
Harbin Ct
Bess Town Rd
Goldmine Rd
Merry Oaks Ln
Silver Ct
Ashebrook Park Rd
Dallas High Shoals Hwy
Pasour Rd
Mccall Ln
April Ln
Kelly Dr
Kiser Rd
Puetts Chapel Rd
Joe Cloninger Rd
Thornburg Rd
Lazy B Dr
Twin Oaks Dr
Miles Bess Rd
Bess Town Rd
Lucille Rd
Kilbart Ct
Costner School Rd
White Jenkins Rd
Polie Ln
Larkin Dr
Meadow Way Dr
Hereford Ln
Applewood Rd
Venice Dr
Wallace Ln
Holstein Dr
Davis Rd
279
321
321B

CHAIN OF TITLE

1. On March 6,1860, William Sloan conveyed a parcel of land containing about 3 acres to John Pasour, Jonas Senter, and Emanuel Carpernter - Trustees of the Lutheran Religious Society. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 3 at page 187.

2. On October 18,1971, Barbara H. Harris and her husband,Robert Harris conveyed a tract of land adjoining the church property, containing about 1 13/16 acres, to John Singleton, Wade Carpenter, and Sammy Kiser - Trustees of Bethel Lutheran Church and their Successors. This deed is recorded in the Gaston County Register of Deeds in Deed Book 1074 at page 32.

These two parcels are the present site of Bethel Lutheran Church.

HISTORICAL SKETCH
BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Bethel Lutheran Church grew out of the pre-Revolutionary settlement of early Germans in the area of present northern Gaston County and southern Lincoln County. Most of these settlers or their parents had originated in Pennsylvania. The earliest church was located at the gap of Pasour Mountain. Originally it had been a Reformed Church being served by Rev. Johann Frederick Doubbert. By 1790 Rev. Johann Gottfried Arends (Arendt) had begun offering Lutheran services at the little church. On September 18, 1814, John Fronebarger Sen. deeded two acres and 34 poles to Adam Deck and George Sellers, "Trustees of the German Lutheran and Reformed Church at Long Creek". Some years later the congregation joined their Methodist neighbors near present Landers Chapel Methodist Church.(1)

In 1858 under the leadership of Rev. George L. Hunt, the congregation decided to erect its own house of worship. On March 6, 1860, William Sloan deeded to "John Pasour, Jonas Senter, and Emanuel Carpenter Trustees of the Lutheran religious Society" about three acres. Sloan gave the property "in consideration of the natural respect I bear towards all religious Societies." Shortly after the congregation received the property they named their church Bethel. Following the Civil War a frame structure was erected in 1868.(2)

The frame church became the setting for an exciting experience in May of 1888. During the tenure of Rev. Michael Luther Carpenter, a son of the congregation, the congregation hosted the synod session for the Joint Lutheran Synod of Ohio, to which Bethel Church belonged. Delegates and pastors came from throughout the south and midwest. The large entourage of buggies and persons was an inspiration for the congregation. The assembly of people was so large that some persons had to listen to the proceedings through the large church windows.(3)

Not long after its greatest accomplishment the small frame church experienced tragedy. On a Saturday afternoon in March 1892 while Rev. Benjamin L. Westenbarger was administering catechism, fire was discovered in the church. A strong wind fanned the flames. Efforts to save the church succeeded in saving only the windows, the stove, and some of the benches. Rev. Westenbarger encouraged "all kind friends who love the Gospel and have a church house, to remember us."(4)

It is uncertain how much impact his plea had upon the community at large. It is certain that the membership, which Westenbarger had described as "strong neither in membership nor in wealth", took the challenge to rebuild.(5) These farmers decided to construct a church with their own hands which would be a significant structure. On the adjacent property of Marion Sylvannus Pasour a brickyard was established where home-made brick was made. Also, at his residence the church held services while they were without a sanctuary. The cornerstone was laid in 1893 and the members labored to complete the task. "Tennessee" John Carpenter is credited with laying most of the brick for the new church. When members got tired, they rested under

the large oak trees surrounding the church and prayed that they would have the strength to finish the job. As soon as the roof was in place, services were held in the new church building. Yet, the church was not completed for some years to come.(6)

The new church building was cherished by all. While no photographs or other likeness of the old frame church has survived, it appears quite likely that the new brick structure was a source of pride and a significant improvement over the past building. Original furnishings on the inside included plaster over wainscoating with beaded siding boards underneath. The ceiling was covered with beaded boards also. The roof was originally tin. On the inside two steel rods ran the width of the church. The rods had been connected on the two outside walls in order to hold the walls upright and the structure together. The floor beams were of heart pine, and the floor was constructed at an angle from back to front. The church was a rectangle structure which would serve the congregation for worship. The handsome steeple at the entrance was both imposing and attractive.(7) The new church was both functional and attractive.

So as Bethel Lutheran Church entered the Twentieth Century, the congregation continued their mission with renewed vigor. Soon changes were made to the church. As the congregation continued to grow, the obvious need for rooms where Sunday School could be conducted manifested itself. While Rev. C. O. Lippard was pastor between 1920 and 1924, the men of the congregation added Sunday School rooms to the back of the church. Alexander Carpenter supervised the construction.(8) The additions made the rectangular structure to be shaped like a cross. Some commercial bricks were purchased but most brick used were homemade of very similar consistency with the original bricks.

While Rev. H. P. Barringer served the congregation, many improvements and changes occurred. In 1935 the roof was covered with tin shingles and the church pews were varnished. During the same year a committee was appointed "to put out shrubbery." On Palm Sunday April 12, 1938, the church dedicated an altar cross, which had been donated by the Women's Missionary Society, and candelabra, which had been donated by Rev. and Mrs. Barringer. In June of the same year Walter Carpenter and Miss Ella Kiser had a well dug for the church which they donated. On July 23, 1939, a Congregational Meeting was held to decide whether to put electric lights into the church. After discussion the vote was taken: 45 for lights and 6 against lights.(9) Additional progress had come to the Bethel congregation.

Originally a wood stove furnished heat. It was replaced with kerosane heaters and finally with a central natural gas heating system. During 1937-1938 a parsonage was constructed in Crouse to serve the minister. Bethel raised $500 for the project, donated 6000 feet of lumber, and supplied 58 1/2 days of labor by the membership. The parish to which Bethel belonged included St. Pauls (Crouse), St. Marks, and Bethphage.(10)

While World War II brought great trauma to our nation and its people, in 1942 during its midst the congregation decided to embark upon a major remodeling project for the church and its contents. Not

only was there a need for general repair and replacement of furniture and material; but also, termite damage appeared in the floor and cracking appeared in the majestic steeple. So as sons of the congregation fought in the war, the membership came together to make significant renovations. All new chancel furniture were placed in the church. These items included pews, a pulpit and lecturn, an altar, altar cloths, chairs, and railing. In addition the floor, which had been built to slope, was sanded, oiled, and waxed. Part of the floor, where there was the most termite damage, was raised with boards and floor beams being replaced. Steel rods were placed in the steeple to stop the cracking and hold it together more firmly. The two steel rods which connected the two walls were covered with wooden boards. The roof was covered. The church was painted, and windows were replaced. The "remodeling church" fund records indicate that $3767.99 was collected and $3595.20 was paid out. The fund was collected from pledges and donations from the membership. In addition some persons made additional donations of furniture and items in honor or memory of loved ones.(11)

On October 26, 1946, the following items were dedicated: an electric candelabra; the Gethsemane window over the altar; and vases on the altar. The Gethsemane window was a special addition because of its asthetic beauty. One of the three who donated it was Rev. L. J. Sidney Carpenter, a son of the congregation.(12) With these additions the basic appearance of the church on both outside and inside would remain the same to the present time.

During the summer of 1951 and during the tenure of Rev. L. S. Miller, a Parish House was constructed behind the church. Dan Mitchem took the contract to build the Parish House. Mrs. Mamie Mitchem and Mrs. Inez Dellinger took leading roles in promoting the building. Pledges were taken from the church membership. The pledges totaled $1738.50, but the records fail to reveal the actual bill for the work and whether all pledges were paid. This frame structure served as a fellowship hall and as meeting places for Sunday School classes which were outgrowing the back of the church. Also during the ministry of Rev. Miller two parishes left this multi-parish arrangement. Both Bethphage (Lincolnton) and St. Marks (Cherryville) became self-supporting.(13)

During the summer of 1960 cement walks and cement brick work was done in front of the church. John E. Carpenter supervised the cement work, and grass was also sown.(14) On June 27, 1965, the congregation voted to re-roof the church. An additional roof was in fact constructed over the present roof and shingles were added. On May 14, 1967, a congregational meeting was held. The motion was made to build a parsonage. It was approved and the plans for the parsonage was discussed. The cost would be $18,600 excluding the well, landscaping, and concrete for the driveway. The parsonage was to be built on a lot in front of the church which had been donated to the church by Kenneth Beam. In the final action at the meeting the congregation called Rev. Wade Norman to be its first full-time minister. This action made Bethel self-supporting and divided the parish with St. Pauls Crouse. On July 9, 1967, the Church Council appointed a committee to oversee

lining up the tombstones in the cemetery and to sow grass in the cemetery. Soon this action also was taken.(15)

While Rev. Tommy K. Beaver was pastor a building program was begun. On August 22, 1971, the congregation voted to purchase additional property adjoining the cemetery at a cost of $3000. Payment for the property would be out of the Building Fund. On February 13, 1972, a congregational meeting was held to discuss future building plans. A motion was made to approve a building program for the church which would be in three phases. The motion stated that the church would start with Phase I, construction of an educational building as soon as the congregation was financially able. Future phases would include building of a fellowship hall and a church sanctuary. After discussion the congregation approved the motion by the vote of 66 for and 7 against. Plans were presented for financing the project. The educational building was to be located on the other side of the cemetery from the church on the newly purchased property. Construction soon began and the project was completed. In a few short years the debt was paid off.(16)

In 1973 Frederick Carpenter, a member of the congregation, replaced the celetex ceiling in the church with a boarded ceiling. Later in 1979 and 1980 Frederick Carpenter and other church members did additional remodeling in the church. The plaster and beaded boards on the walls were covered with wall paper and paneling. The windows were also replaced.(17) The other phases of the building program were delayed.

During 1986 a committee appointed by the Bethel Church Council studied the possibility of building a new sanctuary. At a congregational meeting in January 1987, the congregation voted to study the feasibility of renovating the present church before voting on whether to build a new church. At present the matter is still being studied. It is evident from congregational comments that whatever the decision the membership wants to preserve the old church.(18)

BETHEL LUTHERAN CHURCH
FOOTNOTES

1. "Bethel Lutheran Church", Augustus B. Kiser, (unpublished typescript copy). A copy is on pp. 133-136 of KISER-CARPENTER CHRONICLE, Clyde V. & Alna L. Kiser ed., (Gastonia: Glenn Printing Co., 1983). This record is almost verbatim with "The History of Bethel Church" by Mrs. D. C. Kiser found in the Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I. Deed Book 26, page 393-394, Register of Deeds, Lincoln County Courthouse, Lincolnton, N. C.

2. "Bethel Lutheran Church", Kiser; Book 3, page 187, Register of Deeds, Gaston County Courthouse, Gastonia, N. C.

3. "Bethel Lutheran Church", Kiser; Interview with Mr. George Loy Carpenter, during 1968, of Rt. 1, Bessemer City, N. C., now deceased.

4. LINCOLN COURIER, March 10, 1892.

5. Ibid.

6. "Bethel Lutheran Church", Kiser; Interview with Mr. George Loy Carpenter; Interview with Oscar Claude Carpenter, March 20, 1987, of Rt. 1, Box 216, Bessemer City, N. C.

7. Ibid.; Interview with George Loy Carpenter. Interview with Mr. Frederick Carpenter, Feb. 19, 1987, of Route 4, Lincolnton, N. C.

8. "Bethel Council Meetings", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I, Bethel Lutheran Church, Route 4, Lincolnton, N. C. (Microfilmed by N. C. Division of Archives & History, June 25, 1980). The Churchbook has no page numbers.

9. "Bethel Council Meetings", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I.

10. Interview with Oscar Claude Carpenter. "Bethel Council Meetings", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I

11. "Bethel Church Building Fund remodeled church", "Pledges", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I loose papers in the Churchbook. Interview with Frederick Carpenter.

12. "Bethel Council Meetings", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I

13. Interview with Mrs. Mamie Mitchem, April 16, 1987, of Rt. 1, Bessemer City. "Pledges on Parish House", Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. I, a loose paper in the Churchbook.

14. "Bethel Council Meetings", Ibid.

15. Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. II, pp. 96, 153, 159.

16. Bethel Lutheran Churchbook, Vol. II, pp. 274, 287. Interview with Oscar Claude Carpenter.

17. Interview with Frederick Carpenter.

18. Interview with Rev. Charles Leavitt, Feb. 23, 1987 of Rt. 4, Lincolnton, N. C.

Bethel Lutheran Church

Cherryville Township, Gaston County, North Carolina

Bethel Lutheran Church is a pleasantly sited structure located at the intersection of Rudisill and Long Shoals Roads in the northwest quadrant of Gaston County. According to church historians this is the third structure for the congregation which organized in the early nineteenth century. An original log stucture was replaced in mid-century by a frame building. This frame church was in turn replaced by the brick church which stands today.

The present building was built in 1893 and stands as one of Gaston County's few remaining nineteenth century church structures. The original plan of the church was rectangular with a square, apsidal projection on the west side. An addition made in the first quarter of the twentieth century has altered the plan to its present cruciform shape. The original portion of the church is built of handmade brick which is in good condition. The foundation for the brick is a double course of rubble stone. The brick is laid in common bond with varying ratios. Below the windows the ratio is 1:4. Most of the wall is laid 1:5, with the upper courses being 1:7. The addition wings date circa 1925 and are laid in common bond brick, similar in color to the original brick, but without the header-to-stretcher ratio.

A plain fascia board trims the projecting rafters and serves as the only decorative element at the roofline. The roof of the church is now covered with modern, composition shingles.

The gabled facade contains three bays. A square entrance tower

projects from the facade and acts as the central bay flanked by windows. Throughout the building, the windows are replacement, rectangular sash set in openings that are crowned with brick hoodmolds. The triangular shape of the hoodmold is repeated in the design of the faux buttresses. The inside of the triangular areas is stucco painted white. The faux buttresses are found between bays and at the corners of the church and the tower. These vernacular gothic touches help give Bethel Church its picturesque charm.

The entrance tower is square and divided into three distinct sections. The first stage contains windows on the south and north sides and the doorway on the east, or front, side. A segmental arch of molded brick accentuates the central door. A smaller segmental arch serves as a decorative element over an inscribed stone set in the wall above the doorway. The wording on this stone is set in three lines and reads: BETHEL E. Luth Church 1893. The remnant of an old light fixture is found just above this stone and decorative arch.

Set in the stone steps at the doorway is a marker from the Geological Survey of the United States Department of Interior. Modern wrought iron balusters lead up the steps to the entranceway which contains a set of replacement, six-panel, double doors.

The tower's second stage is comprised of ventilators with the same triangular hoodmolds that are found on the windows. The topmost section of the tower, originally clapboard, is now covered with aluminum siding. The tower is capped with a belcast pyramidal roof which is covered with patterned tin shingles.

in these rooms are beaded board. Translucent glass light fixtures are similar to those in the church sanctuary, dating from circa 1940. Church historians tell that the building was electrified during the 1930's.

In the nave and apse structural and decorative beams are exposed over the modern ceiling tiles which are actually squares cut from sheets of luan paneling. The sanctuary is lit with a double row of incandescent lamp fixtures dating circa 1925.

While the front doors have been replaced, the double doors between the sanctuary and narthex are original, five panel. The architraves, like the window surrounds, are extremely plain, unembellished boards. The four-panelled, folding doors of the transepts should be noted for their decorative, etched glass panes. These are set in the doors at approximately the height of the windows and allow light from the transept windows into the sanctuary when the folding doors are closed. Other doors in the church are a mixture of panel types (five, six, seven). Several doors have ceramic knobs.

The sanctuary ends in a square, apsidal area which contains the altar. This area is set apart from the nave by its smaller size and the round archway which springs from pilasters formed in the masonary wall. These pilasters are three-quarter round and extremely plain in execution.

The altar area contains the same decorative wall treatments as the nave. The ceiling's trayed effect is accentuated with exposed timbers like the ceiling treatment in the nave. A decorative, half-round window over the altar is now enclosed, though lighted electrically.

The north and south facades are duplicates. The three bays of the original part of the church are separated by faux buttresses. The transepts each contain a window on the east side and three on the gable ends. The projection which completes the cruciform plan has one window as the final bay on both the north and south facades. This addition was done with senstivity as seen in the hoodmolds over the windows. While they are not of molded brick like those dating from 1893, they are very similar in design and are made of projecting bricks. The upper areas of the transepts' gables are simply decorated with stuccoed crosses surrounded by projecting brick frames.

The west end of the church has a three part facade composed of a central projecting room which is flanked by two windows. The projecting portion is the result of wrapping the c.1925 addition around the original apsidal end; creating the appearance of a shed-type addition There is a central doorway with flanking windows. The door is replacement, six panel. Above the shed roof the gable end of the church is weatherboarded and pierced with a ventilator.

The interior of the church has undergone several refurbishings which appear to have covered, though not necessarily eliminated, the 1893 interior. The walls are covered with modern wallpaper. Luan paneling has been used for wainscot. The floor in the nave is made of narrow oak boards installed during a 1942 remodeling. Both floor areas of the transepts are raised to two levels. These areas are used by the choir and musicians. Doors in the west walls of the transepts lead to a series of small adjoining rooms which wrap around the altar area. Doors in these rooms lead to either side of the altar. Ceilings

This religious window is sectioned with colored glass and an applied glass portrait of Christ in prayer.

Behind the church is a small white building dating from the middle twentieth century. This building is used as the fellowship hall and contains a kitchen, two baths, and the meeting hall. It is covered with aluminum siding and has a simple gable roof of composition shingles.

At the northern end of the church property a modern classroom building has been constructed of brick. The building has approximately 2500 square feet. Its clipped hip roof is composition. This structure was built in 1974.

The church graveyard lies on the north side of the church and is still in use today. Headstones date from the 19th century, before the church's contruction date of 1893. The graveyard is open, without walls or fence. Both the graveyard and church grounds in general are well tended.

Bethel's property includes the modern parsonage located across Long Shoals Road, facing the church. This is a brick veneer structure built in 1968. It is a typical ranch style with attached carport.