

St. John's Church
Scottsville
Albemarle County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-973

HABS

VA

2-SCOTS,

1-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Addendum to
St. John's Church
Scottsville
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

HABS No. VA-973

Location: Harrison Street at Bird Street (northwest corner), Scottsville, Albemarle County, Virginia.

Latitude 37°47'57" North

Longitude 78°29'49" East

Present Owner: The trustees of St. John's Church.

Present Use: Religious services and related activities.

Statement of Significance: This small Episcopal church, located in the historic James River town of Scottsville, is an excellent example of rural "Carpenter Gothic" architecture. This style is somewhat uncommon in this area of Virginia, where the design of most public buildings is derived from the elements of Jeffersonian Neo-Classicism.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the church stands. All transactions are a matter of public record in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Albemarle County.

1849 Deed dated January 1, 1849: Peyton and Jane C. Harrison sell to Mahala Dawson for \$1000 lots 169, 170, and 171 "in Harrison's Addition to the town of Scottsville." Deed Book 47, page 393.

(Note: "Harrison's Addition" was a twenty-one acre plot owned by Peyton Harrison, annexed by the town of Scottsville in 1831. Lots 169, 170, and 171 made up the block bounded by Harrison, Bird, Page, and Lindsay Streets. St. John's Church stands on Lot 169.)

1863 Deed dated September 16, 1863: Mahala Dawson sells to Charles M. Ragland for \$1500 lots 169, 170, and 171. Deed Book 61, page 38.

- 1875 Chancery Court hearing on May 25, 1875: the Sale of a "part of lot 169 to Henry Gantt and Thomas A. Griffin at the price of \$125" by John B. Moon, receiver in the estate of C.M. Ragland, is "in all respects approved, ratified, and confirmed...And upon the payment of all the purchase money by said Gantt and Griffin, said John B. Moon, who is hereby appointed a special commissioner for that purpose, shall convey to them by proper deed... the aforesaid part of lot 169 on the corner of Harrison and Bird Streets in the town of Scottsville." Chancery Order Book 9, page 32.
- 1877 Deed dated December 6, 1877: land "consisting of a front of 50 feet upon the street known... as Harrison Street and running back 140 feet, the same being a part of the lot known in the plan of the said town as lot number 169, the southern boundary of the same being Bird Street and being bounded on the North and West by the lands of George S. Dawson... and the shape of the same being a rectangle" is conveyed to Henry Gantt, Thomas G. Griffin, and W. Gordon Merick, trustees for St. John's Chapel, by John B. Moon, Special Commissioner of the Circuit Court of Albemarle County. Deed Book 73, page 96.

2. Date of erection: 1875
3. Architect: Unknown
4. Alterations and additions: In 1949 a one-story addition was erected on the north and west sides of the original church building. Construction of this addition necessitated the removal of the original vestry at the west end of the church, and the elimination of the windows in the north wall of the sanctuary.

(This addition, because of the recentness of its construction and its lack of historical or architectural interest, is not treated in the architectural description which follows.)

B. Historical events and persons connected with the structure:

1. St. Anne's Parish was formed in 1745 (concurrently with the formation of Albemarle County) from St. James's Parish in Goochland County. By 1777,

following the formation of Buckingham County to the south, Amherst County to the southwest, and Fluvanna County to the southeast, St. Anne's Parish had been reduced to its present size. The northern boundary of the parish was the Three Notched or Three Chept Road which entered Albemarle County from Zion's Crossroads on the east, crossed the Rivanna at Secretary's Ford, followed the present-day course of Main Street in Charlottesville, and proceeded westward to Crozet and Jarman's Gap.

By the beginning of the American Revolution at least four churches had been established in St. Anne's Parish: the Broken-Backt Church, on land ceded to Fluvanna County in 1777; Ballenger's Church near Warren; Garden Church near North Garden; and an unnamed church (later to be known as the Old Forge Church) near Carter's Bridge.

In the turmoil of the Revolution and the Disestablishment of 1784, the parish fell upon hard times; in fact, from 1784 to about 1820, St. Anne's all but ceased to function as an active parish. By 1835, however, St. Anne's Parish was once again a flourishing entity with two established churches: the revived church at North Garden, and the new Christ Church, Glendower, built in 1832.

Parishioners in the Scottsville area continued to worship at Christ Church, some six miles north of the town, until the early 1870's. The Parish Register makes mention of "Scottsville collections" as early as 1872, indicating that a small congregation must have been meeting in a private home in Scottsville at that time. Finally, in 1875, the Scottsville parishioners were able to erect their own chapel on a hillside lot purchased from the estate of Mr. C.M. Ragland. This 1875 structure has continued in active use to the present day.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography

Jefferson's Albemarle. Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the WPA in Virginia. Charlottesville, 1941.

Meade, William. Old Churches, Ministers and Families. Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1857.

Moore, Virginia. Scottsville on the James: an Informal History. Charlottesville, The Jarman Press, 1969.

Woods, Rev. Edgar. Albemarle County in Virginia. Charlottesville, The Michie Company, 1901.

2. Interviews

Mrs. F. Russell Moon, Jr., Scottsville.

Mr. Robert J. Walls, Scottsville.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. John's Church is a small, rectangular frame building with a steeply-pitched roof, board-and-batten siding, and Gothic Revival detailing. It reflects accurately the stylistic tendencies of its period--the 1870's--and the occasional crudities to be expected in rural workmanship.

2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimension: This building measures sixty-seven feet, nine inches in length (from the east wall of the vestibule to the west wall of the 1949 addition) and fifty-two feet, four inches in width (from the north wall of the 1949 addition to the south wall of the sanctuary.)

2. Foundations: The foundations are of brick laid in common bond, approximately thirteen inches in thickness. In addition, there is a single row of brick piers running beneath the full length of the sanctuary.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: All exterior walls are of wood in the form of vertical board-and-batten siding. The plain battens, which rise from a simple wooden water table with beveled upper edge, average two inches in width and are spaced approximately eight inches apart. The siding has been patched on the western wall of the building, providing a faint outline of the original vestry. All exterior walls are painted white.

4. Structural system and framing: The floor rests upon wooden joists spaced approximately fifteen inches apart, which in turn are supported by 8" x 9" beams resting on the brick foundation

and on the central row of brick piers. The walls appear to be of simple balloon-frame construction, with the studs spaced an undetermined distance apart. In addition, there are four iron tie-rods spanning the width of the sanctuary, their outer ends bolted to the exterior walls just below the point of juncture with the roof.

5. Porches: A flight of five wooden steps leads up from ground-level to the eastern door of the vestibule. There are very simple wooden handrails.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys, one on each slope of the roof. Both chimneys have wind-caps. The chimneys are no longer used and appear to be in poor condition.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: The only entrance to the original structure is a double doorway at the eastern end of the vestibule. The doorway is in the shape of a pointed arch and has a simple enframingent with a chevron-shaped keystone. The doors, which are identical on their interior and exterior faces, are divided into two panels each: a narrow oblong panel below and a fan-shaped panel above which follows the curve of the pointed arch. The hardware appears to be original; porcelain doorknobs and, on the interior face, an interesting keyhole cover of porcelain in the form of drooping leaves or plumes.
 - b. Windows and blinds: The vestibule has two windows, one each in the north and south walls. The openings are in the shape of a pointed arch and have enframingents identical to that of the eastern doorway, complete with chevron-shaped keystones. The windows, which are fixed, consist of six panes of what appears to be original glass.

Originally, the sanctuary had eight identical windows, four each in the north and south walls. Those in the north wall were eliminated when the parish house was built in 1949. The four remaining openings are in the shape of a pointed arch, with the same enframingent and keystone found in the vestibule windows and doorway. The windows

are divided into three sashes, of which only the lowest is moveable. Each sash contains six panes of what appears to be original glass; the panes in the two lower sashes are rectangular, while those in the top sash are oddly-shaped so as to fit into the pointed arch.

Metal pintles are present on all exterior window frames, indicating that blinds once hung there.

- c. Miscellaneous openings: There is a circular louvered opening in the eastern gable of the sanctuary, above the vestibule.

There are several small ventilation openings in the brickwork of the foundation; a large opening which provides access to the crawlspace is located in the foundation below the south wall of the vestibule.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering, and materials: Both the vestibule and the sanctuary have steeply-pitched gable roofs. Both roofs are covered with slate laid so that the uppermost course of slate on the north slope of the roof extends approximately two inches above the ridge.
- b. Bell tower: There is a small two-stage bell tower at the eastern end of the sanctuary roof. The tower is faced with vertical board-and-batten siding and has a slate-covered gable roof. In the east and west walls are louvered openings in the shape of a pointed arch with enframements and chevron-shaped keystones identical to those used on the ground-level doorways and windows. Atop the tower is a wooden cross with chamfered corners.

9. Decorative trim: Scroll-saw panels follow the rooflines on all three parts of the building: vestibule, sanctuary, and bell tower. Decorative cutouts are in six different patterns: (1) along the east and west gables of the bell tower, a simple trefoil with sharply pointed lobes; (2) along the north and south eaves of the bell tower, the same trefoil alternating with small circular cutouts; (3) along the north and south eaves of the vestibule, a larger version of the trefoil with pointed lobes; (4) in the east gable

of the vestibule, a trefoil with more rounded lobes, alternating with circular cutouts; (5) along the north and south eaves of the sanctuary, a pattern consisting roughly of three triangles, each having cusps which divide the triangles into three unequal lobes; and (6) in the east and west gables of the sanctuary, a narrower and more elongated version of (5).

C. Description of interior:

1. Floor plans

- a. Basement: The church has no basement. There is an unfinished crawlspace, averaging three feet in height, beneath the vestibule and the sanctuary.
- b. First floor: Entry to the first floor of the building is gained by means of a double door in the center of the east wall of the vestibule. The vestibule itself is almost square in plan. There are windows in the center of both the north and south walls. Directly opposite the east entry door, in the center of the west wall of the vestibule, is a double door which opens into the sanctuary.

The sanctuary is rectangular in plan. The east wall is unbroken except for the door leading from the vestibule. The south wall is pierced by four regularly-spaced lancet windows; between the first and second windows from the east is a flue which projects into the room and runs from floor to ceiling. In the north wall, near the east end, is a single door which opens into the 1949 parish house addition; to the west of this door, opposite the flue on the south wall, is another flue running the full height of the wall. In the west wall, near the southwest corner, is a single door which opens into the parish house.

Approximately three-fourths of the sanctuary is given over to seating: ten rows of pews arranged in two sections so as to form a center aisle with narrower side aisles along the north and south walls. The remaining one-fourth of the sanctuary, at the west end, is occupied by a raised platform which rises approximately ten inches above the sanctuary floor. Atop this platform, centered against the west wall, a smaller second platform rises an additional eight inches. These two platforms support altar furnishings, most of which are not fixed to the floor.

- c. Attic: The attic space above the sanctuary is unfinished. Entry is via a ladder through a trapdoor in the parish house.
2. Stairways: There are no interior stairways.
 3. Flooring: The vestibule floor is covered with linoleum. The sanctuary is floored with random-width planks, waxed and unpainted. The planks average five inches in width. The platform at the west end of the sanctuary is also floored with random-width planks, the average width in this area being only two inches.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls throughout the structure are finished in white-painted plaster. Ceilings in both the vestibule and the sanctuary are of tongue-and-groove planks averaging five inches in width. The ceiling in the vestibule is painted white; that in the sanctuary is stained a dark brown.
 5. Doorways and doors: The doorway leading from the vestibule to the sanctuary is in the shape of a pointed arch. The enframingent with chevron-shaped keystone is identical to that used around the other doors and windows in the building. The double doors are identical on their two faces, each door being divided into four panels: three rectangular panels of varying sizes and a fan-shaped upper panel whose curve follows that of the arched doorframe. The hardware on these doors is of recent manufacture.
The two doorways leading from the sanctuary to the parish house are identical. Each is rectangular in shape, framed with modern stock moldings. Each door is divided into four panels: two square panels above and two narrow oblong panels below.
 6. Windows: Window enframingents on the interior of the two vestibule windows and the four sanctuary windows are almost identical to those on the exterior, the only difference being a slight variation in the design of the sills and aprons.
 7. Trim and details: The interior of the church is almost entirely devoid of ornamental trim. There is no cornice, and only a very simple baseboard with beveled upper edge.
A bell rope hangs from the bell tower through the ceiling of the sanctuary, passing into the vestibule through a wood-framed hole in the east wall just above and to the left of the vestibule door.

On the south wall of the vestibule, to the right of the window, is a shield-shaped white marble plaque with a black-painted carved inscription memorializing Rev. Thomas E. Locke.

8. Furniture: The sanctuary pews are arranged in two sections and are fixed to the floor. Each section is made up of ten rows, each row in turn being divided into two sections by a panel which joins all ten rows together in a single unit. The end of each row is a single board, approximately thirty inches high and one and one-half inches thick, the top cut in a simple S-curve. The pews are stained a dark reddish-brown and are devoid of any applied ornament.

There is an interesting free-standing baptismal font of carved and turned wood. The basin is lined with tin, and the cover has heavy brass fittings.

Four pews identical to those used for congregational seating have been placed on the raised platform for use by the choir. The remainder of the furniture on the platform--pulpit, lectern, altar, kneeling benches, communion rail, and organ--appears to be of recent manufacture.

9. Lighting: There are five suspended electrical fixtures in the building: four in the sanctuary and one in the vestibule. Additional lighting is provided by six brass kerosene lamps (now electrified) which rest in wrought-iron brackets affixed to elongated wooden plates on the north and south sanctuary walls.
10. Heating: Apparently the sanctuary was originally heated by coal- or wood-burning stoves which were vented through the still-extant flues and chimneys. The church is now heated by means of a central furnace located in the crawlspace beneath the sanctuary, with hot-air registers placed along the sanctuary baseboards.

- D. Site: St. John's Church stands on a part of lot 169, at the corner of Harrison and Bird Streets. Lot 169 originally extended from Harrison Street all the way back to Page Street, but only the portion of the lot fronting on Harrison St. was purchased by the church trustees. The original lot was only fifty feet wide, but was expanded northward to accommodate the parish house built in 1949; the boxwood hedge on the north side of the churchyard probably marks the original boundary of the lot.

The site, which contains several mature evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs, is a hillside sloping

gradually downward in two directions: southward toward the James River, and eastward toward Valley St., one of Scottsville's two main business streets.

The immediate neighborhood is residential, made up mostly of two-story or story-and-a-half houses of varying age, all seemingly in good condition and well cared for. Next door to the church on the north is "Shadows", a large white frame house dating from the early nineteenth century. To the south, across Bird Street, stands "Old Hall", a fine brick house built in 1830. A half-block to the east, on the south side of Bird Street, is the Presbyterian Church, the oldest church building in the town of Scottsville.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was developed by students in the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward ⁴¹⁷Assistant Dean, in 1974. It was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey, and was not completed under HABS supervision, nor edited by HABS staff.