

St. John's Church, Waldrop  
Boswell's Tavern vicinity  
Louisa County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1202

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WALDROP

HABS No. VA-1202

Location: Boswell's Tavern Vicinity, Louisa County,  
Virginia. North side of State Route 22, .5  
mile West of intersection with U.S. Route 15.

Present Owner: The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

Present Occupant and Use: Vacant.

Statement of Significance: St. John's Church stands as a  
well-preserved, little-altered example of the  
Piedmont Classical Revival Church. This build-  
ing reflects the continuation of Jeffersonian  
architectural ideas well into the fourth decade  
of the Nineteenth Century.

I. Historical Information.

St. John's Church, Green Springs Parish (in this century referred to as "St. John's, Waldrop" to distinguish it from near-by St. John's Chapel, of the same parish) traces its beginning to May, 1842, when the Rev. J. Earnest, rector of St. Thomas' Church, Orange, Virginia, reported to the Forty-seventh annual convention of the Virginia Diocese of the Episcopal Church: "(the Rector) has had charge of a Congregation at Mechanicsville in Louisa County, (but it) is not yet organized."<sup>1</sup>

To the convention held in May of 1844 the Rev. Earnest stated that "A neat and commodious brick church is now in building near the village (Mechanicsville, Louisa County), which it is expected will be ready for consecration by the coming fall."<sup>2</sup> When convention met again in May, 1845, the Rev. Earnest reported "A neat and substantial brick Church, at the cost of about \$1,800, has been erected within the past year..."<sup>3</sup> The Rt. Rev. John Johns, Assistant Bishop of Virginia, included the following in his report to the 1845 Convention: "May 1.- Consecrated St. John's Church near Mechanicsville, and preached... I was pleased to perceive, in the enclosure with which it has been so promptly surrounded, the evidence of a considerate care that what had been wrought, should not be impaired."<sup>4</sup>

During the 1850's the church came under the care of the rector of Grace Church, Cismont. Later, it was attended to by the rector of Trinity Parish (the Episcopal churches at Louise Court House and Mineral). In recent years the now

vacant church has been returned to the charge of Grace Church.

In 1888 parishioners in the eastern section of Green Springs Parish built a fine Gothic Revival chapel for services, for its location in those days before the automobile was much more convenient for them than that of St. John's Church. A request for funds with which to build a rectory, written about 1914, stated that services were held once a month at St. John's Church and the "same at the chapel for part of the year."<sup>5</sup> Services at St. John's have never been held more than twice a month; parishioners attended close-by churches of other denominations when their church was not used.

According to the records of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, St. John's Church was built by James R. Magruder. Magruder, who owned Frascati in Orange County, was a builder by trade, and had probably worked under Jefferson's master builders at the University of Virginia. Around 1840 Magruder as contractor, along with sub-contractor Malcolm Crawford (who had been trained by Jefferson for work at the University) were employed to construct the plantation house for West End in the Green Springs neighborhood. The Watson family of West End were communicants at St. John's Church, and it was probably through them that Magruder was given the contract to build the Church. It is said that William B. Phillips, another Jefferson workman, was first contracted to build St. John's Church, but very soon thereafter a change of contractors was made in favor of Magruder. This possibly explains the use of three different brick bonds in the building.

The only major alteration to St. John's Church was the addition of a small vestry room to the rear (north) of the building. As this room was apparently built very early in the history of this church, it must be regarded as part of the old (although not original) fabric of the building.

A 1948 renovation of the church resulted in brick steps and sills for the south doors and the addition of two narrow chimneys on the north wall. St. John's Church stands today as a well-preserved example of its type.

## II. Architectural Information.

### A. General Description.

St. John's Church, Waldrop, is a small brick building in the Jeffersonian Classical Revival style. The church measures approximately 36 ft. x 40 ft. with the addition of a vestry room, 10 ft. square on plan. The original building consists of one large room with no gallery. Against the north wall is the chancel, which measures 9 ft., 3 in. x 15 ft., 9 in. Pews are original and are mostly in their original positions. Floors, windows, doors, communion rail, trim, and hardware are all original.

The church is in very sound condition, and, especially considering that it is no longer used, it is well cared for.

### B. Exterior Description.

This rectangular building is brick with wooden trim. A Roman Doric entablature runs continuously around all four walls of the church. The triglyphs lack guttae; the metopes are plain. There are no mutules. The entablature reads from bottom to top: fascia, astragals, metopes and triglyphs, astragal, cyma reversa, fascia, very large (10 in.) cyma recta. The roof is covered with slate.

The water table projects  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. and consists of eight courses above grade: one course headers, six courses stretchers, one course headers.

There are air vents to the area beneath the floor on the east and west walls. These occur in the fifth and sixth courses

of the water table, measure 2-3/4 in. x 6½ in., and are spaced 3 ft., 10 in. apart.

The south, or front, elevation of the building is pedimented. The brickwork is of Common (stretcher) bond. Evidence of the mortar joints having once been pencilled is apparent on this, and all other exterior walls.

There are two door openings, each with double doors. The door trim is asymmetrical: ogee moulding followed by two receding flat surfaces. The reveals of the doors are panelled with a single long, narrow panel per face. The outer perimeter of each panel is moulded with a flattened ogee-like moulding. This type of narrow panel and moulding becomes a motif used repeatedly throughout the building. Each door on the south also features this motif; within each of these panels is another, smaller raised (by ½ inch) panel (non-bevel).

The tympanum is finished with flush boards. Centered in the lower half of the tympanum is a louvered lunette. All wooden features, including tympanum, entablature, doors, and trim are painted white.

Later alterations to this elevation were the replacement of wooden steps and sills with brick. A wooden cross was added to the peak of the pediment in 1948.

The east elevation brickwork is of Flemish Bond above the water table. There are three window openings. The wooden window sills and trim are painted white. The trim is of the same form as that of the south doors. Each window is of two sashes, each sash containing four lights over four lights.

Today the windows are covered by dark green blinds which are painted closed for security reasons.

The north facade is of seven-course American Bond. There are no window or door openings. The tympanum of the pediment is of unpainted brick. Rising from the ground through the entablature are two narrow chimneys (one close to the east corner and one to the west). These date to the Mid-Twentieth Century.

The vestry room projects from the north wall of the church. The bond is mixed-course American Bond. On the east and west exterior walls of the vestry are small window openings, and on the north wall is a door opening. All window and door trim is plain and flat with plain corner blocks. There are flat header arches above each window and the door. The reveals of the door are panelled similarly to the doors of the reveals of the south elevation. The north door itself is of six panels: two small over two large, over two more large. Each panel is moulded with a flattened ogee moulding.

There is a cornice on the east and west sides of the vestry, consisting of a cyma reversa, fascia, and cyma recta. The cyma reversa stops short of the corner. The cornice end boards on the gabled north vestry wall extend horizontally briefly to be stopped by small square blocks. The end boards merge vertically with wide rake boards. All wood work, windows, and door on the north church wall and vestry walls are painted white. The windows are covered with dark green blinds.

The west exterior wall of the church is identical to the

east except that the brickwork is Common Bond.

C. Interior Description.

The oiled floor boards of the interior appear to be quarter-sawn pine. A six inch, beaded base board runs around all four walls and is painted dark brown. The walls are plaster, painted a beige color. All doors, windows, and trim are painted a bone color. The church's only surviving parishioner remembers a stenciled Greek Key around the top of all four walls early in this century. This was covered during consequent paintings. The plastered ceiling is painted light green. Suspended by chains from the ceiling are six electric lights with white glass globes. Prior to these there were no provisions for lighting.

The south wall contains the two door openings. Door and window trim on the south, east, and west interior walls is in the same form as that of the exterior south door trim. The doors themselves are double, and each has the long, narrow panel with flattened ogee mouldings around the outer perimeter. There are no smaller raised panels within these panels. Locks are old, made of iron with brass knobs, and measure 7 In. x 5 in. The east lock has been reversed and turned upside-down. These locks are stamped with an eagle and the words "No. 60 Improved Lock." There is a "cat's tail" bolt of iron at the top of the right hand west door. Along the western portion of the south interior wall there is a small, backless bench, whose endboards are in the shape of flattened and tilted "S" - curves. Marks on the plaster of the eastern portion indicate

the former location of a pew. Today a font stands in front of this spot.

Proceeding from both door openings are aisles, with single width of pews to the east and west, and a double width of pews between. Dividing the double width is a screen composed of three wide, beaded boards capped by a rail. A similar rail extends around the backs and sides of each pew, and consists of a semi-ellipse with a small cavetto moulding beneath. The pew ends are upright rectangles, and are panelled with the same motif as the south door panels. The rear surface of the pew backs contain this panel motif turned on its side. There is a two inch base on the aisle-side of each pew end. The base, seat, and top-rail of each pew are stained a dark brown color. The backs and sides are painted bone. The wall end of the pews rest on the wall base board and the pew backs extend three inches into the window sills.

In front of the northern-most double-width center pews is a screen which consists of two oblong versions of the panel motif, underneath of which are two more of the same. This screen is painted in the same scheme as the pews. In front of the northern-most east-aisle pew, two pews were placed at right angles to the aisle pews to form a choir. A screen imitating the center one was placed there during the 1948 renovation.

There are three windows in each of both the east and west walls. All window jambs are splayed. Window sills have no aprons. Window trim is in the same form as the exterior window trim.

A raised platform which forms the chancel has been placed against the north wall. The communion rail runs along three sides, with "cannon-ball" topped newel posts in the corners. The rail itself is circular, and is supported by closely-spaced, rectangular-sectioned spindles, the narrow edge of which faces outward.

Against the north wall, and in the center of the chancel is an altar fabricated from plywood, and of recent vintage. The movable pulpit and lecturn seem to be Victorian. To the west of the altar is a four-panel door leading to the vestry. Door trim is a flattened ogee type moulding. Balancing this opening, there is door trim to the east of the altar which encloses only plaster wall, rather than an opening.

The walls and ceilings of the vestry room addition on the north of the church are plastered. Window and door trim is identical to that of the chancel door trim in the church, proper. Window jambs are splayed. Colors duplicate the church interior.

#### D. Site Description

St. John's Church faces south (toward Va. Rte. 22) and is a large, partially wooded church yard. A white-painted board fence, with rounded corners to the southeast, northeast, and southeast encloses the ground, and dates from recent years. A cemetery lies immediately west and northwest of the building, with burials dating only from this century. This is, apparently the only cemetery that has ever existed here.

The local custom in the Nineteenth Century was for family

members to be buried in small family cemet<sup>e</sup>ries at the "home place".

The land slopes to the east, where there was once a gate that led to a now-forgotten road. This portion of the yard is wooded. West of the church, a young stand of hardwoods will soon cause this area to be wooded, as well. Scattered about the grounds are a number of large, old white, red, black and post oaks. These venerable plants, along with the site's isolated rural location, impart a strong sense of solitude and of times long past.

#### E. Related Buildings

The church that would seem to have had the strongest direct influence on the form of the structure at St. John's, especially in light of the fact that both churches had strong Jeffersonian workmen's ties, is Christ Church, Glendower, located in southeastern Albemarle County and erected in 1831. The kinship can be seen in the general "massing" of the building and through the use of the Roman Doric entablature. Other related buildings include the courthouses of neighboring Fluvanna and Greene Counties.

St. John's probably inspired the form of other local churches, especially Mechanicsville Baptist Church, located only .3 mile west of St. John's. Although a date of 1828 is attributed to this building in the survey files of the Virginia Historic Landmark Commission, the deed to this property, dated 1849, called for a "Brick church to be build" here.<sup>6</sup> While, with the exception of the Baptist church having a side door,

gallery, and Tuscan, rather than Doric, entablature, the two neighboring churches were practically twins. Unfortunately, the original form of the Mechanicsville Church is today largely obscured, as the old building has been sandwiched between two modern additions.

Six miles north of St. John's, the Gordonsville Presbyterian Church stands well-preserved. This 1848 edifice is much more strongly Greco than Roman, and is crowned with a bell tower. Yet, a definite relationship with St. John's, especially through general proportions and lines, may be seen.

### III PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was produced at the School of Architecture of the University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture, during the Spring Semester, 1983. The project was undertaken by William E. Drake, Graduate Student in Architectural History. The material produced was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.

IV. Notes

<sup>1</sup>Diocese of Virginia of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S., Forty-seventh Journal of the Convention, 1842.

<sup>2</sup>Diocese of Virginia, Forty-ninth Journal of the Convention, 1844.

<sup>3</sup>Diocese of Virginia, Fiftieth Journal of the Convention, 1845, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>Bishop John Johns, "Assistant Bishop's Report", in: Diocese of Virginia, Fiftieth Journal, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>Ladies' Aid Society of St. John's Church, Green Springs Parish, Letter: "An Appeal for Aid Toward a Rectory Fund," nd. (circa 1913).

<sup>6</sup>Louisa County, Virginia, Official Documents, Deed Book BB, p. 58, 1849.

V. List of Sources Cited and Consulted

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- Chisholm, Claudia A., and Lillie, Ellen G. Old Home Places of Louisa County. Louisa: Louisa Historical Society, 1979. Historical Virginia Historical
- Conversation with Mr. Richard Cote, Architectural Landmarks Commission (Researcher in the Master Workmen of Thomas Jefferson's Training).
- Conversation with Miss Grace Martin (b. 1910), Life-long Parishioner and Sole Surviving Communicant of St. John's Church, Waldrop.
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- Perdue-Davis, Vernon, and Rawlings, James S. Virginia's Antebellum Churches. Richmond: Dietz Press, 1978.
- Virginia, Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S. Diocese of Journal(s) of the Convention (1840-1855).
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- Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. Survey files: Louisa County: St. John's Church, Waldrop; St. John's Chapel; Mechanicsville Baptist Church.

ADDENDUM TO:  
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WALDROP  
(Blenheim)  
State Route 22, .5 mile West of U.S. Route 15  
Boswells Tavern vicinity  
Louisa County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1202

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Addendum to  
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WALDROP

HABS  
VA  
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HABS No. VA-1202

Location: State Route 22, Boswells Tavern vicinity, Louisa County, Virginia.

Site Description: Located in the midst of dwellings and along State Route 22 in Louisa County, St. John's Church, Waldrop stands in a rural setting in the Boswells Tavern area. St. John's Church, Waldrop is one-story in height, with a 36' x 40' footprint, and has a small (10' x 10') square addition on the north side. Enclosed by a wood fence and protected by a thick grove of trees on the north side, the site includes the church building, a front gate, the remains of a circular driveway, some landscaping, and a small graveyard.

A front gate provides access to the site (fig. 1). Aligned with the building's left front door, the two wood gate doors swing to the south and are each attached to a 2' x 2' brick pillar. At the entrance gate one can see the remains of a circular driveway. Although not original to the site, the circular driveway most likely provided access from the front gate to the church entrance located on the building's south facade. Due to the site's overgrowth, the gravel driveway is barely identifiable in its current state.

Although the site is overgrown, there is some vegetation that was purposefully planted on the site. Two of the most prominent specimens are a pair of magnolia trees located in the center of the circular driveway and in direct alignment with the east and west corners of the building. The magnolias were added after 1983.

The other permanent plantings are located around the perimeter of the building and include eight boxwoods. In addition, a Chinese *photinia* is situated symmetrically between the two front doors.

A graveyard is located on the northwest side of the property and consists of fifteen gravestones dating from 1937 to 2002. Two of the gravestones mark the resting place of C. Francis and Eunice G. Fisher, a couple who married at the church prior to 1928. This couple's nine-year-old daughter was the first individual to be buried in the graveyard, and her interment suggests that others buried there were likely former members of the church congregation.

Architectural Description:

Exterior: The building is built of brick and displays three different bond types. The south facade (fig. 2), which serves as the front entrance of the building, and the west facade (fig. 3) are constructed of common bond. In contrast, the east facade is built of Flemish bond and the north facade (fig. 4) is built of English common bond. Each of these bond types was popular during different periods of time. The oldest of the three, English common bond, was popular in the early eighteenth century, whereas Flemish bond became popular around 1750 and continued to be into the nineteenth century. Common bond emerged as a popular method of construction after the 1830s.

The use of different bond types indicates both the modern building methods of the time as well as those that were outdated. The choice to use common bond on the south and west facades, those most frequently viewed by the public, dates the building to after 1830. The church builder showed that his construction methods were up-to-date by using the most popular bonds on the most frequently viewed facades. At the time of the church's construction the English common and Flemish bonds were outdated and were therefore used on those sides of the building designated as the rear. The building's date can be further reinforced by the fact that the water table is composed of square bricks, which became popular beginning in the 1820s. Since the church is in a rural area, it would have taken time for modern building methods to appear and be adopted.

Also seen from the brick construction, the 10' x 10' rear portion of the building is clearly a later addition. Although both the north facade and the addition exhibit English common bond, the two walls do not interlock which indicates that the 10' x 10' portion was not part of the initial building campaign.

There are also two other minor additions to the building. On the north side, two chimneys were added to either side of the 10' x 10' structure. These chimneys are constructed of 2 1/4" x 8" x 3 1/4" smooth, red bricks. The other minor addition consists of two sets of brick stairs at the south side entries. Because of the type of brick used, both the chimneys and the steps were constructed sometime during the twentieth century.

The exterior molding of the building, constructed of wood and painted white, reinforces the idea that those facades of the building most viewed by the public

exhibited the most modern methods of construction as well as the more refined trim work. While both facades have pediments, the south pediment consists entirely of wood whereas the triangular gable end of the north pediment consists of brick and is bordered by wood molding. The much cheaper and less refined method of pediment construction used on the north facade further stresses the fact that it served as the rear of the church.

The bottom edge of the pediment includes a cornice and frieze, which wrap around the entire building. The cornice, which is representative of all the molding on the exterior and interior of the main building, is Greek Classical and includes a cyma recta detail. The Doric frieze below the cornice consists of alternating triglyphs and metopes. Also included in the pediment is a semi-circular vent for the attic space (fig. 5).

One interesting note about the molding is that none of it, exterior or interior, includes back bands which were typical of classical moldings. It can only be assumed that the molding did not take on a particularly refined appearance due to the building's location in a rural setting.

Further emphasizing the fact that the 10' x 10' rear portion is an addition is the obvious differences in the choice of molding used. The trim in this section includes corner blocks, also popular in the early nineteenth century. Also the builder tries to replicate the Greek Classical molding used in the main building; however, the curves of the original molding are represented by angles in the newer section.

Interior: The interior of the church consists of plaster walls and ceiling, wood floor, wood pews, and wood molding. The interior is in fairly good condition considering the fact that it has not been used for over twenty years; however, there are some indications of future problems. Honeybees have built a nest inside the brick wall of the east facade, leaving a large brown stain around the southeastern window. In addition to the bees, ivy recently worked its way into the building and is growing along the floor. With continual neglect, the above elements – plaster walls and ceiling, wood floor, wood molding and wood pews – will be adversely affected.

The plaster walls and ceiling are currently painted antique white; however, there is evidence showing that the previous color was light green. Scars on the plaster

walls show several changes that occurred at some point during the church's history. The three prominent scars are located at the front of the chapel, on the north wall. Two are circular and laid out symmetrically on the north wall. One is above the door to the church addition and the other above the false door, which was probably constructed at the same time as the addition to maintain symmetry (fig. 6). There is no evidence of these scars on the exterior, due to the addition, so it is assumed that they may have been original windows. The third scar is rectangular and centered on the north wall. The dimensions of this scar match the dimensions for the interior doorways, but it is located too high on the wall for the opening to have been a door. Since it is centrally located on the north wall, perhaps it, too, was a window.

Additional scars can be seen on the wood floor. These are located below each pew and represent a wood panel that once ran the length of the bench. This lower panel was a poor design element due to the noise that could be produced from people's feet kicking it; not needed structurally, it was removed. However, the last pair of pews in the central aisle retains the wood panel. There are also two scars visible on the floor in the rear of the chapel in close proximity to the south wall. Most likely, these represent two additional pews in the east and west aisles at the rear of the building. The scars or outlines of these pews are shorter than the other pews due to the swing of the front doors. It appears that these two pews have been moved to the front of the chapel, as there are two shorter pews at the front of the east and west aisles. It clearly can be seen that these two pews were not originally placed in these locations because they are closer to the pulpit area than the front pew of the central aisle.

The wood pews, themselves, are simple in construction but have wonderful detail (figs. 7-9). The rail, bench, and baseboard are painted dark brown, and all of the panels are painted white. The aisle panel is pieced together with mortise and tenon joints. The molding within the panels are Greek Classical and similar to the molding throughout the church.

Like the pews, the wood railing and balusters in the front of the church are painted dark brown and white. The pickets, which are painted white, are rectilinear and measure 1 1/4" x 3/4". The railing and balusters are presently wrapping around the platform at the front of the chapel. The platform, not original to the church, was constructed in the twentieth century, and it can be seen that the railing and balusters have been altered due to this new construction. An obvious distinction is the fact that the two half balusters butted

up to the north wall are taller than the balusters connecting to the railing; it also appears that these two half balusters were originally one.

The interior wood molding is painted white and mimics the exterior molding. The builder used diagonal (miter) joints in constructing the door and window surrounds, a typical construction technique in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Multiple alterations have occurred at the various times throughout the church's history. In addition to those already mentioned, the church currently has electricity, as well as a heating and air conditioning system, things not original to the building. Before the HVAC system was installed, there were two heating units connected to the chimneys; these supplied heat to the structure at some point during the twentieth century.

Historian(s): Rebecca Snyder, Rebeccah Ballo, and Janey Terry, May 2003.

Project Information: The documentation of St. John's Church, Waldrop took place as part of Louis Nelson's (2003) field methods class at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, Department of Architectural History. Students recorded various structures through measured drawings and written description; the record the students created was dependent on their ability to read what the structure was telling them about its construction history rather than on traditional documentary research.



*Figure 1: Looking at South Elevation from Perimeter of Site*



*Figure 2: South Elevation*



*Figure 3: West Elevation*



Figure 4: North Elevation

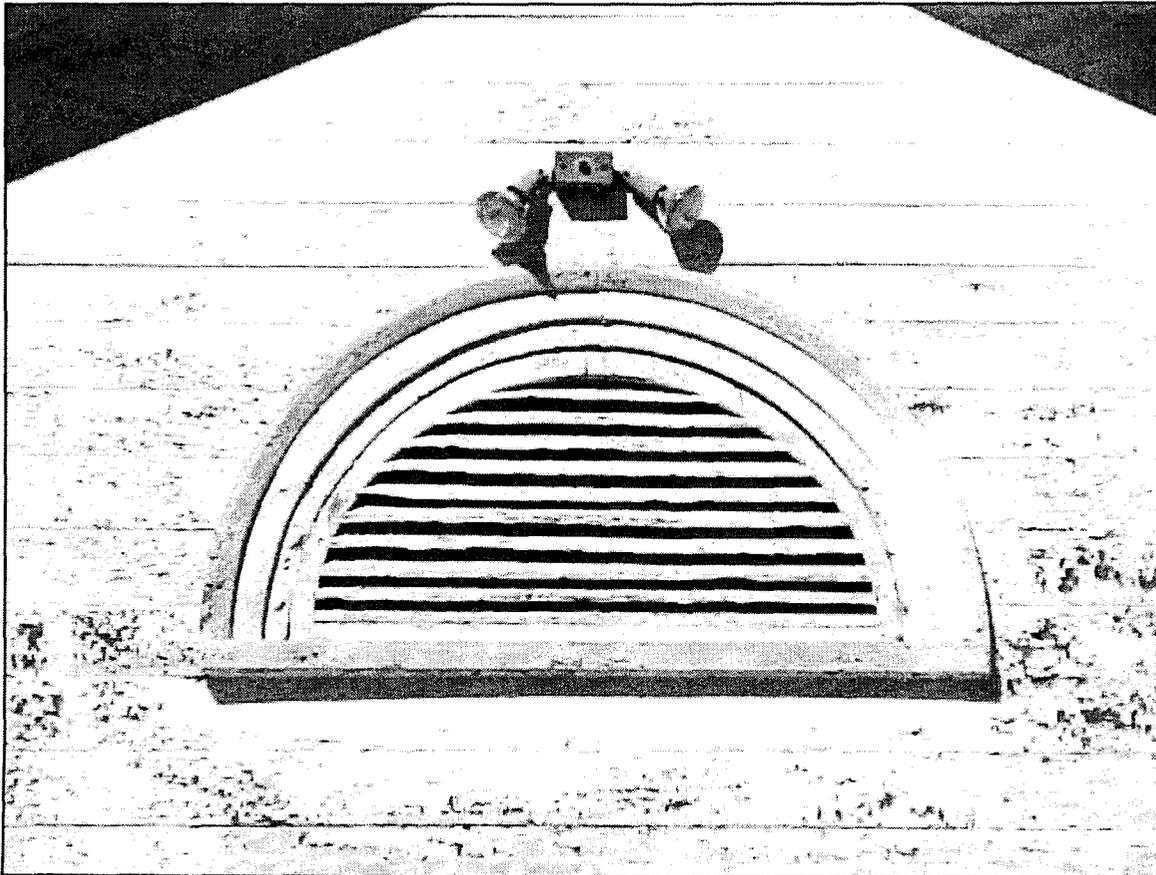


Figure 5: Attic Vent Within the Pediment on the South Elevation

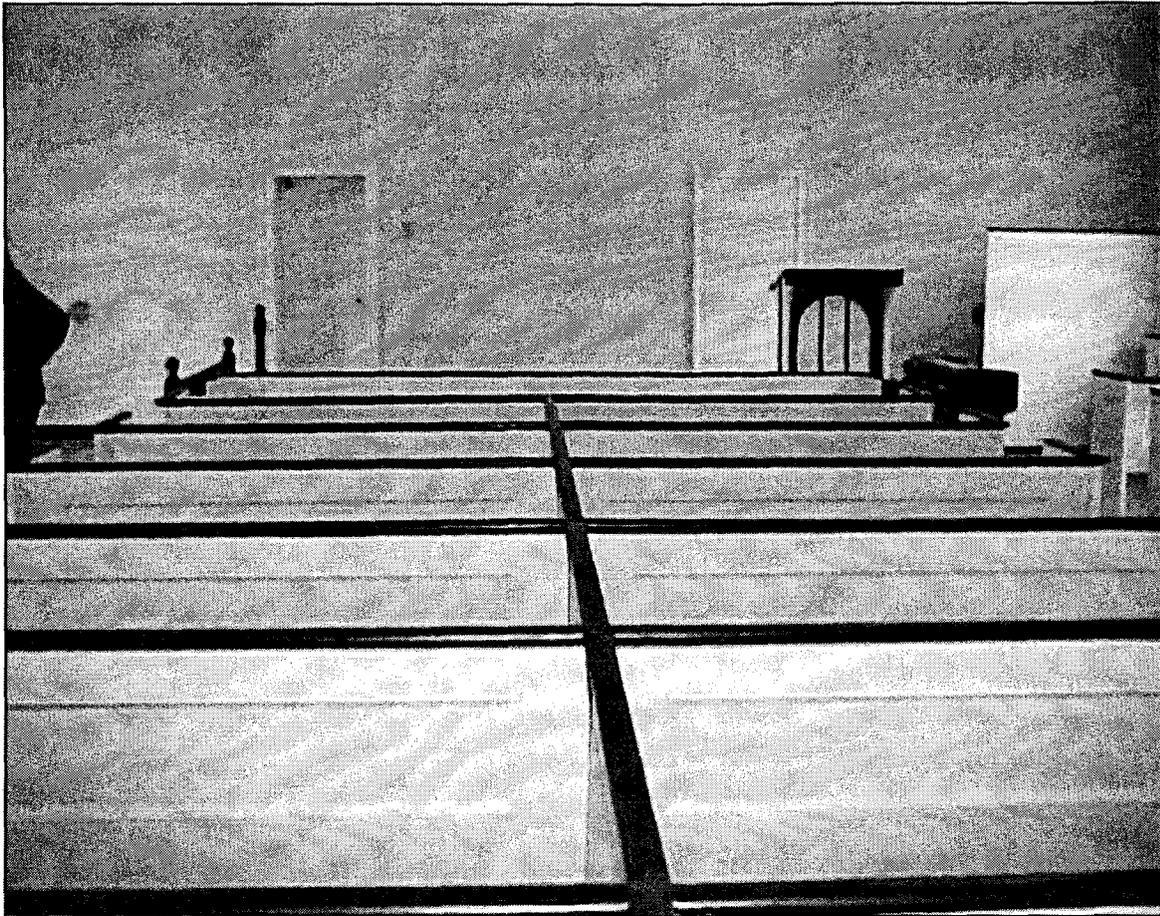
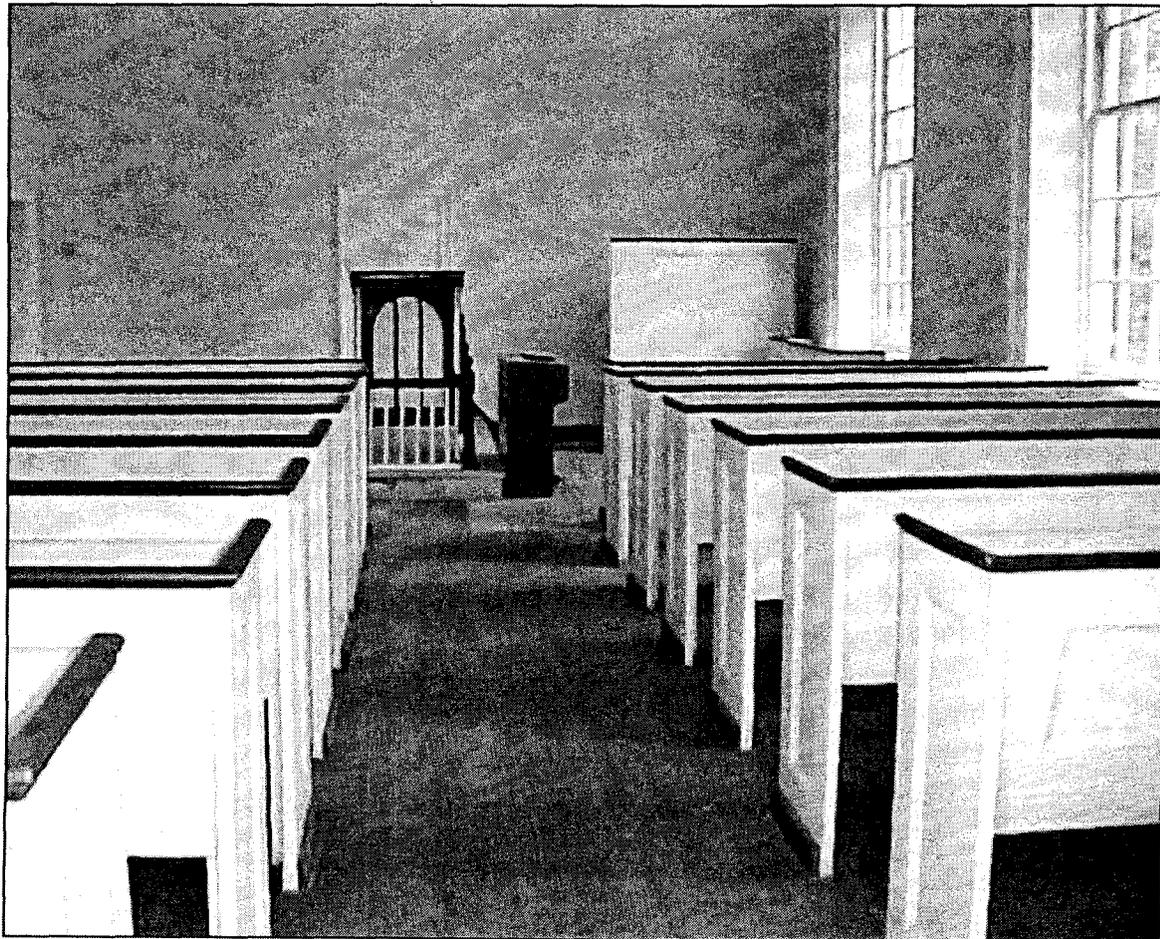


Figure 6: Interior Looking Towards Front of Chapel (North Wall)



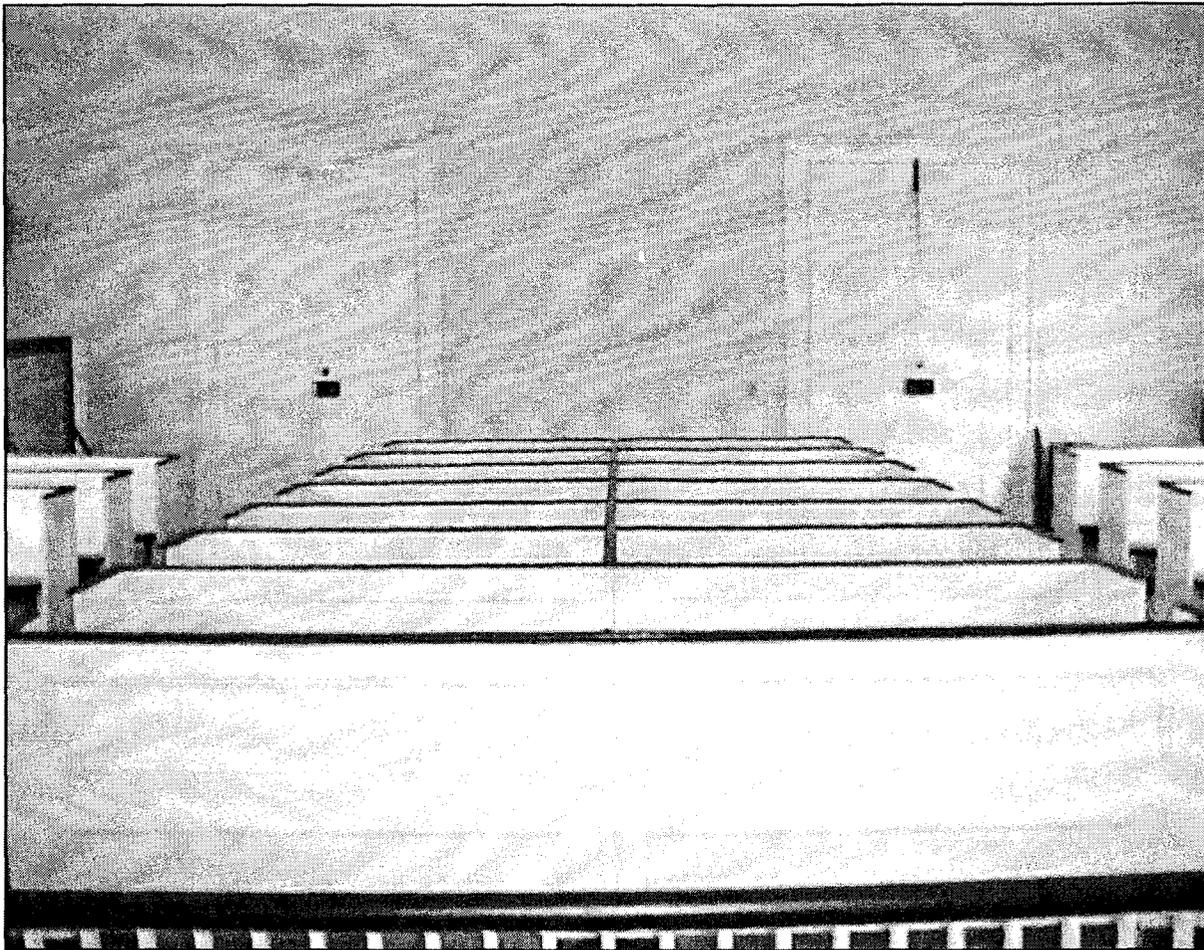


Figure 8: Interior Looking Toward Back of Chapel (South Wall)

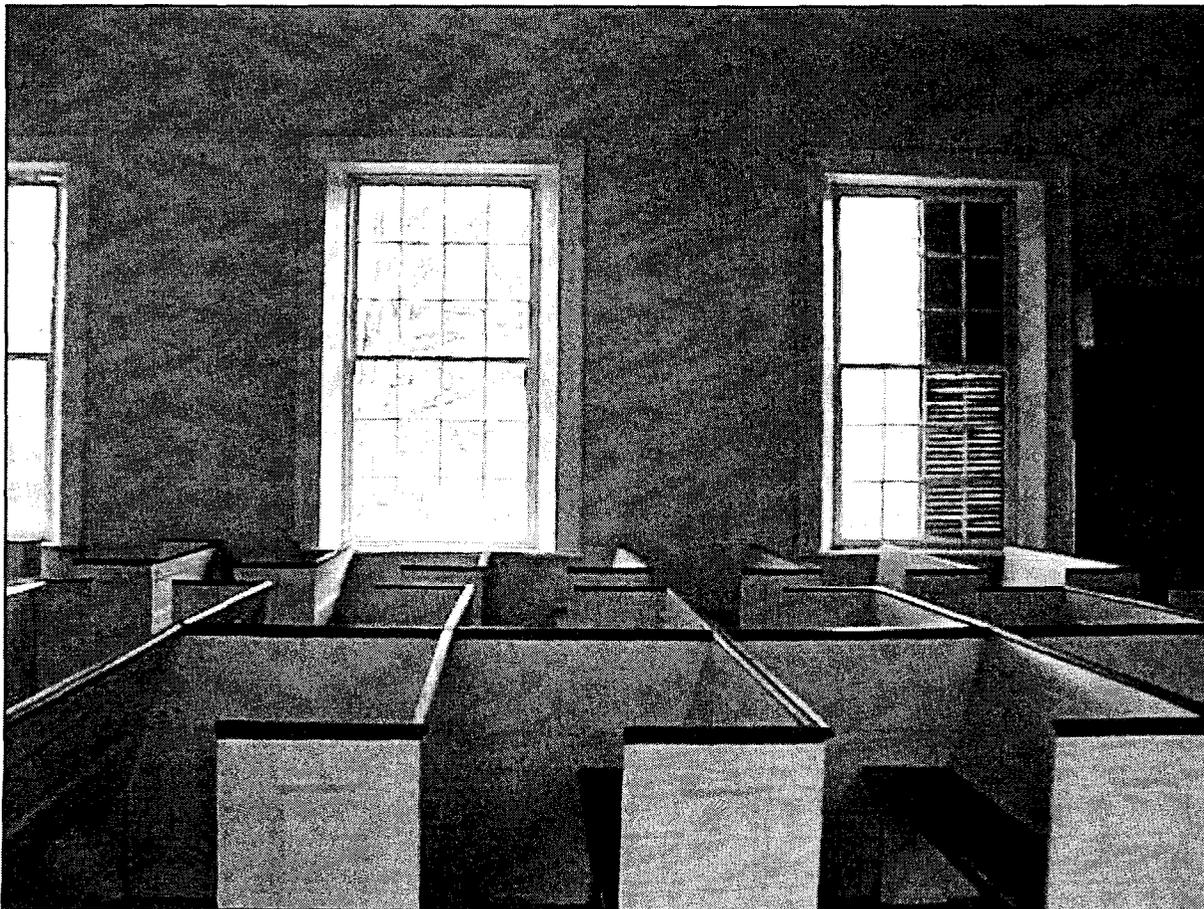


Figure 9: Interior Looking Toward East Wall