

CEREMONY COMMEMORATING LISTING of NATIONAL REGISTER FOR  
RED HOUSE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

January 6, 2008

James M. Long, Presentation

HISTORY

Red House Presbyterian Church is the second oldest church in Caswell County and has continuously occupied its church grounds and cemetery longer than any other church in the county. Its 250 year old congregation dates back to 1755, the very beginning of organized Presbyterian religion in North Carolina with direct ties to the Reverend Hugh McAden who was the first Presbyterian missionary to permanently settle in the state and serve as a resident minister. McAden is of outstanding importance as he was instrumental in establishing a large number of Presbyterian churches across North Carolina from Mecklenburg County in the west to Wilmington in the east during the mid 1750's. The Hico church, the original name of the Red House Presbyterian Church congregation, was one of the first churches founded by him, and he served as its first resident minister from 1768 until 1781. Hugh McAden's grave, located in the 225-year-old church cemetery and marked by a large monument, meets one of the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life.

The present church building, erected in 1913 is the fourth such structure erected on the site since 1756. Architecturally, it is an excellent example of the Classical Revival style in rural Caswell County and its design by architect H. C. Linthicum is highly sophisticated and sets it apart from other churches in the county of the same time period. The church building is of local architectural distinction and meets another of the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Architectural Context

The first Hico church building was constructed in 1756. No first hand description of that original building has survived, but according to the scholarly writings of Herbert Snipes Turner, D. D., most of the early church buildings in Scotch-Irish communities of the mid-eighteenth century were built of logs with the pulpit located at the side of the room underneath a "sounding board" which extended out from the wall.<sup>1</sup> The first Hico church building served the congregation until 1806 when a second building was constructed beside the first. The name of the church was changed to Red House at that time. The name came from a noted inn nearby which was a popular stage coach stopping place between Hillsborough and points north in Virginia and elsewhere. The inn was painted red, and the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, op cit,

area was referred to by locals and travelers as Red House. The second church building was consumed by fire shortly after it was completed and a third building was erected in 1809. This third building was remembered as a "quaint wooden structure" with the pulpit located between two exterior entrance doors by which the congregation entered the sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> If not by design, this arrangement discouraged church members from arriving late for preaching services. Seats to one side were reserved for black slaves who attended with their masters. The pews were made by Thomas Day, a noted free black cabinetmaker in nearby Milton. They were given to nearby Gilead Church when the fourth church building was constructed in 1913.

By 1913, the congregation of Red House Church decided to replace the 1809 building. During that year, a committee of the church was appointed to raise funds for the new endeavor. Through its diligent efforts, \$7,000 was raised and ambitious construction plans were made. For design of the new building, the committee was authorized by the congregation to engage the services of Hill Carter Linthicum (1860 -1919), a well known architect of Durham, North Carolina. Linthicum's design for the 1913 Red House Presbyterian Church was very different from the traditional wooden framed country churches of that period. He created plans for a Roman temple to be constructed of brick in the Classical Revival style.

The construction contract for the new building was granted to Henry Fields, a master builder from nearby Roxboro. Church records state friends and members of the church contributed materials and labor to aid the effort. In their exuberance over progress being made, members of the congregation upgraded plans and raised an additional \$1,000 to cover the costs of a complete set of stained glass windows and curved birch wood pews. The pulpit from the 1809 church was moved into the new building and has continued to be used until the present. Also, after completion of the 1913 Red House Church building, the old 1809 building was pulled by a team of horses across rolling logs to the farm of James Allen in Semora, one mile northeast from its original location. It was used as a storage facility for tobacco and hay crops until it burned in the 1990's.

Befitting the name "Red House", the architect specified the addition of red coloring in the mortar which masons used to create a monochromatic red brick exterior. A very prominent Doric portico or porch, supported by four fluted wooden columns resting on granite capped square brick pedestals creates the impression of a much larger scaled building. Ruth Little-Stokes in An Inventory of Historic Architecture Caswell County North Carolina states, "...its dignified design gives the

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<sup>2</sup> Powell, op cit,

small structure a monumentality out of proportion to its diminutive size." Extensive use of granite, stained glass and mahogany wood set it apart from all other rural churches in the county. Its design style was rarely used except in larger urban buildings.

Features not observed anywhere else in present day Caswell County include a string course of granite surrounding the building at the level of all window sills, an inserted fanlight stained glass window in the pedimented gable façade of the portico, and a terra cotta tile roof. In addition, exterior pilastered wall columns and exposed ornamented interior trusses are features that are rarely found in any public buildings in the county.

### Hugh McAden and the Establishment of the Presbyterian Church in North Carolina

Great numbers of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian immigrants sailed to America between 1720 and 1750 because of religious and economic discrimination in Ireland. They were required to pay tithes to the Church of England which they did not attend and were largely excluded from the purchase of land controlled by wealthy landlords. The promise of religious freedom and cheap land in America was irresistible. A popular destination was Pennsylvania. By 1750, one fourth of the population of that state was Scotch-Irish. Benjamin Franklin estimated the number to be 350,000. The great influx of immigrants led to tensions with the established residents. As a result, the Lord Proprietors of Pennsylvania ordered that no more land be sold to the Scotch-Irish immigrants in York and Lancaster counties. New immigrant families began to look elsewhere for settlement opportunities. A southern migration to the frontier lands of Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia was the choice of many. So great was the number of families following the Indian trading paths south through the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, it became known as the Great Wagon Road. The families entering North Carolina did so in the northwest Piedmont region, north of present day Winston-Salem. Most continued southwest into the Yadkin and Catawba valleys, but a few families turned eastward after rumors of smallpox to the southwest raised fears. History reports that several families traveled as far as "the old Red House."

In fact, by 1740 several families of Scotch-Irish immigrants had reached the northeastern Piedmont area of North Carolina and settled on the Hico, Haw and Eno rivers in what is now Caswell, Orange and Alamance counties.<sup>3</sup> By the mid 1750's, small Presbyterian fellowships had

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<sup>3</sup> Turner, Herbert Snipes, Church in the Old Fields: Hawfields Presbyterian Church and Community in North Carolina; The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1962

been established in communities where small churches were soon to be built at Hico (now Red House), Upper Hico (now Grier's), Eno and Fields of Haw (now Hawfields).

Most Scotch-Irish immigrants preferred the Presbyterian religion over other denominations and Presbyterianism became the religion of choice for many frontier families. The demand for resident Presbyterian ministers to serve churches in rapidly growing Scotch-Irish communities on the western frontiers of Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia, exceeded the supply available from the sponsoring synods of Philadelphia and New York. To temporarily meet this demand, the Synod of Philadelphia and the Synod of New York directed each of their ministers to take time off from their regular assigned pastorates each year to become supply (visiting) preachers to churches without resident ministers in the South. Many supply ministers visited and preached at churches on the Hico, Eno and Haw rivers over a twelve year period from 1756 to 1768. The churches they served are associated with the earliest efforts to organize the Presbyterian religion in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

#### Reverend Hugh McAden

Reverend Hugh McAden was born in Pennsylvania of Scotch-Irish parentage and was educated at Nassau Hall, now Princeton University. He was licensed to preach by New Castle Presbytery of his home state in the spring of 1754. Rather than assigning him to a local pastorate, the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia sent him as the first Presbyterian missionary to the South for the purpose of visiting North Carolina congregations (Presbyterian or otherwise) which existed without pastors. He traveled by horseback for two months through territories endangered by battles of the French and Indian wars, often pondering whether he should continue on or turn back. A July 1755 entry in his journal states: "I resolved to prosecute my journey, come what will, with some degree of dependence on the Lord for his divine protection and support that I might be enabled to glorify him in all things, whether in life or in death...". Finally, on August 1, 1755, he crossed the Virginia line into North Carolina several miles north of the present location of Red House Church. On August 3, 1755, he preached his first sermon in North Carolina to a fellowship group at the home of Solomon Debow. This was a short distance from where a number of those in attendance would build the Hico (later named Red House) Church the following year (1756).

After preaching his first sermon in the Hico community, Mr. McAden continued his missionary journey by traveling to the Eno community of Orange County, and then to the Hawfields community of Alamance County. Having preached at Eno and Hawfields, he traveled across Orange County into Granville County on the Tar River, thence to Grassy Creek and Fishing Creek before returning to the settlements of Eno and Hawfields. He then rode on to the Buffalo settlement in Guilford County,

and thence through areas of present day Davidson, Rowan and Cabarrus counties into Mecklenburg County, preaching at every opportunity along the way. From Mecklenburg County, he traveled into the lands of the Catwba Indians in South Carolina before returning to Mecklenburg County and proceeding east to Scotch settlements on the Cape Fear River. After spending some time in the Cumberland County area, he then traveled down the Cape Fear to Wilmington and thence up through Pender County to Duplin County where he preached to well-organized churches known as the "Welsh Tract" and "Goshen Grove". Leaders of these two church congregations pleaded with him to remain with them; they jointly made out a call (formal request) for him to become their pastor. He did not accept the call at that time, but traveled back across eastern North Carolina to Granville County and the Red House community where he preached a final sermon on May 2, 1756. His missionary journey through North Carolina had begun and ended with sermons preached in the Red House community. Accompanied by Solomon Debow to the Dan River, Mr. McAden departed from the state on May 6, 1756 and began a northward journey back home to Pennsylvania. His missionary journey to North Carolina had lasted exactly nine months. During that time, he had preached almost daily to different groups of people in different places.

The accomplishments of Hugh McAden are best summarized by the noted historian R. D. W. Conner, Secretary of the North Carolina Historical Commission, who wrote in the History of North Carolina, Vol. 1, The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods <sup>4</sup> the following description:

In 1755 came Hugh McAden, a truly great missionary, who did more, perhaps, than any other person to establish Presbyterianism on a firm foundation in North Carolina. Traversing almost the entire length and breadth of the province from the Catawba on the west to the Neuse and the Pamlico on the east, from the Roanoke on the north to the Cape Fear on the south, he visited places on the extreme frontier where not only 'never any of our missionaries have been', but where the voice of a Christian minister had never before been heard, and preached in private houses, in courthouses, in churches and chapels, under the trees of the forests, wherever, indeed, he could gather two or three together. Scotch, Germans, and English, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Quakers and Churchmen, and 'irregular' people who knew 'but little about the principles of any religion', all flocked eagerly to hear him. He began

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<sup>4</sup> Conner, R. D. W., The History of North Carolina, Vol.1, the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods 1584-1783; The Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago and New York, 1919

his great missionary tour in North Carolina on August 3, 1755 and brought it to a close on May 6, 1756, and all along his route left Presbyterian communities firmly established.

One of the many churches he is credited with founding is Red House Church.

Upon his return to Pennsylvania Mr. McAden was ordained by New Castle Presbytery in 1757 and thereafter accepted the call of the Duplin County churches in North Carolina which had earlier expressed their desire for his services. He reported to that post in the year 1757 and thus became the first pioneer missionary of the Presbyterian Church who became a resident pastor and permanently settled in the State of North Carolina.

He remained with the Duplin County churches for ten years until he concluded the climate of that area was detrimental to his health. This caused him to move back to the Red House community of present day Caswell County where he had begun and ended his 1755-1756 North Carolina missionary journey. At a meeting of the Hanover Presbytery at Buffalo Church in Guilford County on March 2, 1768, he accepted the call of what was then known as Hyco (later Red House), Dan River and Country Line churches. Thus, he became the first resident minister of Red House Church.

It is a well-known fact that during the American Revolution, General Cornwallis and the British army "ever showed a dislike to Presbyterian ministers, as the immediate cause of much of the stubborn resistance which met them at every step in Carolina."<sup>5</sup> In his "History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America", author E. H. Gillett states, "In initiating the Revolution and in sustaining the patriotic resistance of their countrymen to a legal tyranny, the ministers of the Presbyterian Church bore a conspicuous, and ever foremost, part."<sup>6</sup> British soldiers studiously destroyed all that they could not carry away, and the Presbyterian clergy were generally the special objects of vengeance."<sup>7</sup> To North Carolinians, the Revolutionary activities of Henry Pattillo, David

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<sup>5</sup> Foote, Reverend William Henry, Sketches of North Carolina, Third Edition; Harold J. Dudley, Synod of North Carolina, Presbyterian Church in the United States, Raleigh, 1965

<sup>6</sup> Gillett, E. H., D. D., History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America Volume 1; Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, Philadelphia, 1864

<sup>7</sup> Breed, Reverend W. P., D. D., Presbyterians and the Revolution; Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, Philadelphia, 1876

Caldwell, James Hall and Hugh McAden were well known.<sup>8</sup> It is unknown whether Cornwallis had any reliable information as to McAden's personal opinions considering the British invasion; he certainly would have known that McAden and fellow Presbyterian ministers, James Creswell, Henry Pattillo, and David Caldwell were community leaders in the region which produced the Regulator rebellion in the Orange County area in the late 1760's. In 1768, these four ministers had addressed a letter to Colonial Governor Tryon concerning this rebellion.<sup>9</sup> Whatever his knowledge of McAden's opinions relative to the American insurrection, General Cornwallis and his troops, retreating through Caswell County en route to Hillsborough, after failing the catch General Nathaniel Greene in the their famous "race to the Dan River", did not neglect an opportunity to pay McAden "a visit" in February, 1781. Arriving at Hico Church, Cornwallis encamped a contingent of his forces on the church grounds and learned of McAden's death a short time earlier. His troops opened McAden's grave in the church yard "and are credited with the destruction of his journals, books and other records and with extensive damage to the church and [McAden's] family property."<sup>10</sup>

The grave of Hugh McAden remained unmarked for 132 years until 1913. On September 28, 1911, Dr. D. I. Craig, stated clerk and chairman of the Historical Committee of the Orange Presbytery, informed the delegates of the Presbytery that "No stone of any kind marks the spot where this man, the first settled minister in North Carolina is buried." The Presbytery promptly took steps to "erect a suitable monument over the grave of Mr. McAden."<sup>11</sup> Such a monument was unveiled on August 3, 1913, and in a memorial sermon delivered on that day Dr. Craig stated, with regard to the British soldiers, "tradition says his new made grave was profanely opened and his body taken up and mutilated! It is said that in re-filling the grave, the work was not more than half done, hence the explanation of the sink in the ground which has so conspicuously marked his resting place for so many years."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Baldwin, Alice M., Sowers of Sedition: the Political Theories of Some of the New Light Presbyterian Clergy of Virginia and North Carolina; *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan., 1948) pp 52-76

<sup>9</sup> Turner, op cit,

<sup>10</sup> Powell, William S., When the Past Refused To Die, A History of Caswell County, North Carolina 1777-1977; Moore Publishing Company, Durham, North Carolina, 1977

<sup>11</sup> Stone, op cit,

<sup>12</sup> Claytor, N. R., The Unveiling of a Monument to the Memory of the Rev. Hugh McAden;

This concludes my remarks relating to past history. Let's consider what this National Register listing will mean for our future. Cathy has some thoughts on that subject.



Response to National Register Designation

Cathy Long

January 6, 2008

So what does all this really mean? It means nothing much –or it means everything.

As most of you know I do Jim's secretarial work, so after draft after draft and footnote after footnote and official form after official form I could be the first in line to say I'm glad that's over and done with. We'll just put up the plaque out front and look at it from time to time and say, "That's nice" -- and then promptly forget it.

But it actually does mean a little more than that. For instance, this designation places on us church members a duty to care for, to protect and to preserve this place—this building, this cemetery, this historical spot. But we'd do that anyway. The church fathers have always assumed that responsibility and have done an outstanding job in doing so

I have come to believe that being on the National Register has placed a mantle on Red House and its people that represents a higher standard than we've had before. It's like the standards set in many jobs or professions. Teachers' certification, passing the bar for attorneys, licensing for contractors, physicians and businessmen all raise to another level the expectations for behavior in each instance. I love those commercials for the Marines...the guy puts on the uniform and he stands taller and prouder and seemingly becomes visibly stronger. Or for you young people still in school, it's like when you work hard and make the honor roll; as an honor student, you are set apart—you are expected to set an example for others to follow. Red House Church has a different standard to live up to because of this acknowledgement of its past. We are to be an exemplar of religious faith in our community and in our county and state.

And I believe being on the National Register will serve as a safety net for our church. There will come a time, as I'm sure there have been times in the past 250 years, when things will not always be so wonderful, when problems will arise and we will struggle as a congregation. When our commitments are tested or when we falter without a clear vision, it is then we can look to the plaque on the porch and to the faith journey of others it represents and know that we will endure.

When I was in high school, not quite as many years ago as the age of this building, I had to recite a poem at assembly one day. I can only remember a couple of lines, but it went something like this:

“Hold high the torch; you did not light it's glow  
Twas given to you by other hands you know.  
I think it started on its pathway bright  
That day when God said, 'let there be light'”

So here is the real significance of recognizing and honoring the work of those who have gone before us. The torch handed to them, and now passed on to us, came from a loving God. It is this God whom we acknowledge as the ongoing source for the strength and courage which has sustained Red House Church and its people to this day.

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