

Griers Presbyterian Church in rural Caswell County is a simple but well-detailed Greek Revival temple-form building housing a congregation organized in 1753, during the early settlement period of the county. It is the oldest established congregation in the county and in the Orange Presbytery. One of only five antebellum churches surviving in the county, it is a handsome example of rural Boom Era (1840-1860) architecture in this predominantly rural county whose economy during that period was based on the cultivation of burley and later bright-leaf tobacco which created a substantial planter class. The property also contains a cemetery with the graves of church members marked by weathered tombstones typical of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

One of five antebellum church buildings extant in Caswell County, the ca. 1856 Griers Presbyterian Church near Frogsboro survives in its isolated setting as a simple but well-executed example of Greek Revival temple-form church architecture, set in a rural context. It is a simple, rectangular frame building, resting on a replacement low cinder block foundation, one bay wide and two bays deep, covered by a front gable roof of standing seam tin with a boxed cornice and wide returns. In form and detail, it is quite similar to the earlier Yanceyville Presbyterian Church (1850, Yanceyville Historic District), which has led to speculation that it was built by contractor Alfred A. Mitchell, who has been documented as the builder of the Yanceyville church. Elements in common include the basic temple form of the churches, the two-part crosstetted window and door surrounds, and the interior plan with galleries along each side supported by classical posts and fronted by a low, recessed, paneled retaining wall. The principal difference between the two is building material, the Yanceyville church being of brick construction, while Grier's is frame.

According to a recent county history, "except for the Anglican chapels of the colonial period, the earliest congregation in Caswell County apparently was Presbyterian." Griers Church is thought to have been organized by 1753 while two other Presbyterian congregations in the county, Red House Church and Bethesda Church, predate the Revolution. The Baptists were the only other denomination organized in the area prior to the Revolution. Local tradition credits the founding of Griers Church to Samuel Bell, a staunch Presbyterian from Pennsylvania who settled on the banks of Hyco Creek in Orange County, now Caswell County; the church was originally known as Upper Hyco Meeting House. In 1755, the Reverend Mr. Hugh McAden (d. [1781]), the first Presbyterian missionary to North Carolina, preached to several congregations in the area including one at Hyco which is thought to have been the predecessor of Griers Church. The church was without a regular minister until 1768 when McAden was called to the church where he served until his death in 1781. McAden, a 1753 graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), was sent by the New Castle Presbytery as a missionary to North Carolina in 1755. From 1757 until 1768, McAden lived and worked in Duplin and New Hanover counties before moving to serve the Griers Church congregation. McAden was an important figure in the organization of the Presbyterian Church in North Carolina, and he has been described as "one of the chief founders of the Presbyterian Church in the South."

After the death of McAden in 1781, the congregation was without a regular minister until the Reverend Mr. William Moore was called to the church in 1790 where he served until 1801. In 1797, the church purchased a one-and-three-quarter acre plot of land from James Richmond and Ann Greer "for the purpose of building a Meeting House." It is thought that this church site was within a few miles of the present church. Sometime between May of 1809 and September of 1810, the congregation changed its name from Upper Hyco Meeting House to Griers (often spelled Greers) Church. Local tradition claims that the new name was chosen in honor of Ann Greer, from whom the church property had been purchased at a nominal price of forty shillings. During the early part of the nineteenth century, the membership of the church was apparently very small and often unable to support a minister. The records of the Orange Presbytery show that the church shared a minister with several other small Presbyterian churches in the county, and that services were only held once a month. In 1810, an observer noted that in Caswell County there were four Presbyterian congregations with a membership of 200 or 250; at the same time there were four Baptist churches with about 300 members and three or four Methodist societies with 250 or 300 members. During the tenure of Reverend Samuel Paisley from 1829 to 1831, the membership of Griers Church grew from thirty to fifty-two. Probably as a result of this growth the congregation purchased a three-and-one-half acre plot about a mile from the present church and built a new structure. Only the abandoned church cemetery, with stones dating from the 1830s and 1840s, remains at this site.

In 1850, Reverend John S. Grasty (1825-1883) was called as the pastor of both Griers Church and the Yanceyville Presbyterian Church. As soon as Grasty became pastor of the Yanceyville church, he began plans there to build a new church. In 1850, the Yanceyville congregation erected a handsome temple-form structure built of brick; the church was designed by Dr. Nathaniel Roan of Yanceyville and was constructed by builder Alfred A. Mitchell. During Reverend Grasty's tenure, the existing Griers Church building burned. In 1856, the Griers Church congregation purchased a two-acre lot on the road from Frogsborough, a nearby community to Yanceyville for \$135, "together with benefit of a spring ... for both persons and horses ... ," and built the present church. The church is a frame duplicate of the brick Yanceyville Presbyterian Church, although Griers Church is slightly larger and simpler in detail. Both buildings are temple-form structures, one bay wide and two bays deep, with identical crosssetted trim around the openings. The interior arrangement and woodwork of both churches is nearly identical. The similarity of the two buildings suggests that the Griers Church congregation also engaged builder Alfred A. Mitchell to build their church, and that Mitchell, perhaps at Grasty's suggestion, used the Yanceyville church as his model. Griers Church is a large and substantial church structure for rural North Carolina, but it is a simple building in comparison with Caswell County's finer antebellum domestic buildings and the pretentious brick churches in Yanceyville and Milton. The financial limitations of the church's small congregation, made up largely of farm families with modest holdings, probably dictated the building's simplicity.