

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Raleigh, Wake County, WA8136, Listed 12/19/2019

Nomination by Mary Ruffin Hanbury, Hanbury Preservation Consulting

Photographs by Mary Ruffin Hanbury, June 26, 2018



Camera facing northeast



Sanctuary, camera facing south

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 813 Darby Street

City or town: Raleigh State: NC County: Wake

Not For Publication: ☐ N/A Vicinity: ☐ N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 x A B x C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
District	<input type="checkbox"/>
Site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Object	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

foundation: BRICK

walls: BRICK

other: GLASS

roof: SYTHETICS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church (1965) is a complex composed of a large, modern, A-Frame church and more modest support spaces (1987 addition) that enclose an interior garden. The facade of the sanctuary (south elevation) is dominated by a glazed wall superimposed with a large wooden cross. Dual entrances are tucked below a pent roof, a continuation of the eaves of an intersecting wing containing support spaces. The exterior is clad in brick veneer; the roof is clad in composite shingles. There are stained glass windows along the east and west sides of the sanctuary. The interior of the church sanctuary is an open volume of space with masonry walls and a paneled ceiling punctuated by large laminated wood trusses. The chancel area is slightly raised, bound by a wooden rail with metal posts that engages a lectern to the west. The main altar is set in front of a dossal hanging from a wooden valance with a shield featuring a beehive which symbolizes St. Ambrose. In 1987 an addition to the east of the original administrative area was built. The addition added a double-loaded corridor running north-south. The northern most offices on the west side of this corridor abut the original parish hall. This corridor intersected with an added extension of a single-loaded corridor that connects the additions to the original office spaces and the sanctuary.

Narrative Description

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church sits on a 2.96 acre parcel on the north side of Darby Street between South State Street and Boaz Road. To its west is the National Register-listed Rochester

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Wake County, NC

Name of Property

County and State

Heights Historic District (WA4581), a 1950s African-American residential subdivision. To its north is a wooded area and Walnut Creek. To the south, across Darby Street, is a row of single-family homes and beyond them to the south, Fuller Elementary School. The church property has a semicircular drive off Darby Street that services paved parking areas to the east and west of the church and passing the church entrance on the south elevation. The perimeter of the property is lightly wooded. Landscaping has been recently installed northeast of the church building to improve drainage and water quality.

The church complex itself includes the sanctuary to the west and a series of offices and support spaces to the east. Together they enclose a rectangular interior courtyard. The entire building is clad in brick veneer and has a series of intersecting gabled roofs clad in composite shingle.

When the church was dedicated the complex was "C" shaped in footprint. The east wing was added in 1987 providing additional office and classroom spaces, and enclosing the interior courtyard.

The sanctuary is a front-gabled, A-frame mass with considerably smaller, cross-gabled appendages on the north and south ends of its west elevation. The southern of the two houses a double leaf, western entrance to the narthex. The northern of the two is an electrical room.

The facade of the sanctuary has a slightly projecting, glazed, central section, framed by masonry pillars. The glazing is set in a gridded pattern of rectangular lights with framing painted white, upon which is transposed a large, brown, wooden cross. The cross extends to grade and is intersected by a pent roof that is itself the extension of the eaves of the southern wing of offices. The pent continues to form the roof slope of the western narthex entrance. Flanking the glazed central section of the sanctuary facade, and sheltered by the continuous pent roof, are paired, wooden, double-leaf doors.

Extending east from the sanctuary is a transverse hall. As it extends to the east, its brick veneer siding is interrupted by three glazed bays with rectangular lights in casing painted white, echoing the fenestration pattern on the facade of the sanctuary. The eastern two glazed bays have lights in a regular grid pattern, but the bay closest to the sanctuary has an irregular pattern, highlighting three crosses composed of casework framing. There are two additional sets of double-leaf entrance doors along this elevation in the wing. East of the eastern-most doors are paired, two-part windows with a larger fixed pane above a smaller hopper window. Above this eastern entrance, the front gable roof of the eastern section of the complex (oriented on a north/south axis) intersects with the facade's transverse hall, creating the impression of a gable-on-hip roof with an exposed triangular louvered vent above the transverse ridge.

The east elevation has two sets of double-leaf entrance doors, at the south and north respectively. Given a change in grade, the northern doors are accessed by a set of masonry steps that ascend to the north along the side of the building. Above this northern entrance is the exposed triangular louvered vent where the gable of the north wing of the church complex extends above the roof ridge of the eastern wing. Windows on this elevation are 1/1 sash with canted rowlock sills.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

The north elevation of the church has a series of 1/1 and 2/2 wooden, horizontal-light sash windows with rowlock sills and a single leaf entrance, all east of the sanctuary. The north elevation of the sanctuary is brick veneer with double leaf exterior doors servicing the mechanical room that extends at the northwest corner of the complex.

The west elevation of the church has two projecting low gabled bays--the northern one housing a mechanical room and the southern one housing an entrance to the narthex. Between them are five large window bays with rowlock sills set within the masonry wall. Each bay houses paired, rectangular stained glass windows that extend from the eaves to a framed panel below.

The courtyard walls are clad in brick veneer. The western courtyard wall is shared with the sanctuary and has stained glass windows with wooden panels below. The southern courtyard wall has windows servicing the southern office wing. The eastern courtyard wall has windows, double-leaf doors at its south end leading to an internal corridor, and a single leaf door roughly centered on the wall that opens directly into a room now used as a choir room. The northern courtyard wall has a series of windows serving the parish hall.

The sanctuary interior is composed of a narthex, a nave, and a chancel. All three are within an open volume marked by laminated wooden trusses that extend from the floor to the peak of the gable. The narthex is divided from the nave by a low, wooden-framed partition screen that extends the width of the interior, reminiscent of a rood screen, though positioned at the opposite end of the nave.

The narthex is dominated by the large window at its south, with stained glass panels outlining the wooden cross on the framing. Vinyl tile flooring that appears to be original extends from the narthex to the nave, which has two rows of pews divided by a central aisle. Side aisles extend along the east and west sides of the nave. The side aisles provide access to the mechanical room at the northwest of the complex, and the sacristy and parish hall to the northeast. On the east and west walls are stained glass windows.

The chancel is slightly raised and has red carpeting. It is surrounded by a low wooden railing with metal posts. Three steps lead to the chancel where there is a wooden pulpit integrated into the railing, west of center. The central section of the chancel, housing the altar, is set back and framed by enclosed bays to the east and west. The wooden altar is supported by two posts, one has a metal letter Alpha affixed to it, the other an Omega. Between them is an iron Chi-Rho symbol. Beyond the altar is a red dossal suspended in front of which is a wooden cross. Above the dossal is a wooden valance with the carved shield of Saint Ambrose centered upon it.

The remainder of the complex is largely offices, classrooms, and a parish hall arrayed around a central courtyard. The transverse hall that extends east from the narthex is a single-loaded corridor with offices and the courtyard to its north. The original building has two offices east of the narthex, one north of the hall and one at its terminus. However in 1987 the latter office was reduced to accommodate an extended hall and additional offices.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

The hall turns north, on axis with exterior doors on the east end of the facade, and then east, on axis with exterior doors at the south side of the east elevation, creating a corner office for the rector at the southeast corner of the building, all added in 1987. Continuing north, the hall becomes a double-loaded corridor servicing classrooms, a choir room, and restrooms. The hall intersects a short hall extending west from the northern entrance on the east elevation, all added in 1987. There are two small classrooms to the north of the intersection. To the west is a large parish hall which is part of the original building campaign. At the parish hall's northwest is a kitchen and its southwest additional restrooms. The hall continues between the kitchen and restrooms to access the sacristy and ultimately the east side aisle of the church, near the chancel.

Interior finishes are modest and durable and include vinyl tile flooring, vinyl base, fluorescent ceiling-mount light fixtures and simple door and window trim. Finishes in the addition appear to be those installed in 1987. Flooring the parish hall appears original but flooring in the other original administrative areas appears to have been replaced with the addition for consistency. The parish hall and original offices retain original 2/2 horizontal light, wooden, double-hung sash windows. The parish hall retains a wooden accordion partition system. Access to the interior courtyard, currently under construction, is at the southeast--on axis with the exterior door at the south end of the east elevation. Windows on the courtyard are a mixture of 1/1 wooden double-hung sash and 2/2 horizontal-light, wooden double- hung sash.

Integrity

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church retains integrity of location, having never been moved. It continues to be located south of an undeveloped parcel along Walnut Creek. Though some infill residential development has been added to its south along Darby Street, the housing is screened by a berm and mature plantings. The Rochester Heights subdivision to the west is a National Register historic district that itself retains high integrity contributing to St Ambrose's integrity of setting. The church's design continues to maintain a fair degree of integrity despite the addition of later administrative offices to the east. The addition is sympathetic in size, massing, and materials and it is not unreasonable to assume that given a limited construction budget, the initial concept was designed to allow for later expansion. The hallmark qualities of the design, such as the open sanctuary in its A-frame form and the semiotic signaling of the crosses on the facade are retained. Most of the original materials in the original section of the church complex have been retained giving it strong integrity of materials. Likewise, the lack of significant alterations in the core of the complex give sit a high degree of integrity of workmanship. Still used as a house of worship for the congregation that built it, St Ambrose has a high degree of integrity of feeling and association.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☒ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ETHNIC HERITAGE:BLACK

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

Period of Significance

1965

Significant Dates

1965

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Valand, Leif

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church is significant at the local level under Criteria A and C in the areas of architecture, and ethnic heritage: black. The church, one of three Episcopal Churches built in the mid-twentieth century by architect Leif Valand embodies distinctive characteristics of modern church architecture, with a shift away from more traditional forms, materials, and location following demographic shifts from the downtown to the suburbs in the post WWII era. The congregation, the second African-American Episcopal church in the state of North Carolina, has its roots in the denomination's outreach to newly emancipated communities by the Freedman's Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church through what is now St. Augustine's University. St. Ambrose Episcopal Church meets Criteria Consideration A as its primary significance is its architectural distinction and historical importance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History of St. Ambrose Church

The 1865 General Convention of the Episcopal Church created the Freedman's Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church (not to be confused with the federal Freedman's Bureau), with a principal goal to educate newly emancipated African Americans. The first executive director of

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Wake County, NC

Name of Property

County and State

the Commission, The Rev. Jacob Brinton Smith, left the commission early in its history to manage a generous bequest that helped to establish a school for African Americans in Raleigh. That school, St. Augustine's Normal and Collegiate Institute (now St. Augustine's University), was chartered in the summer of 1867 and welcomed its first four students in January 1868.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church has its roots in St. Augustine's. The church, originally known as St. Augustine's Church, was founded in February 1868, soon after the school admitted its first students. The Rev. Jacob Brinton Smith, a white man, was the principal of St. Augustine's and the leader of the congregation. Among the early congregants were 10 African-American parishioners at nearby Christ Church who transferred their membership.

In 1868 the North Carolina Legislature allowed the construction of a church building at the corner of Dawson and Lane Streets on land leased to trustees from the congregation with the stipulation that they operate a school.¹ In 1879 the church was admitted to the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina as an entity separate from St. Augustine's Normal and Collegiate Institute.² The church is seen on the 1881 Shaffer map of Raleigh. The 1884 Sanborn Insurance map shows the church on Dawson between Lane and North Streets. The 1888 Sanborn map labels it as a church and school. From as early as 1888 to as late as 1911 the church had a school with a student body consisting of 70 to 165 students ranging from kindergarten to seventh grade.

The 1896 Sanborn map has more details and shows a frame building 14' high to the eaves with a main block and a rear addition, labeling it as St. Augustine Episcopal church (Colored). The church was re-named St. Ambrose in 1896 at the suggestion of diocesan Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire. The name St. Ambrose reflects a close relationship with the school from whence it started, like the relationship between Saints Ambrose and Augustine.

In 1900 the trustees exercised powers granted to them in the Public Laws of 1891, Chapter 443, to sell the lot at Dawson and Lane Streets and using the proceeds to buy a new parcel on the south side of the city. An article in the *Raleigh Times* in May 1900 references the St. Ambrose church at Dawson and North stating that the church was to move to "the lot formerly occupied by Pogue's tobacco warehouse, corner of Wilmington and Cabarrus Streets, the latter place having been exchanged with the colored people for the lot where the church now stands."³

The *Raleigh Times* reports in October of that year "Work on the parish hall of St. Ambrose Colored Episcopal church is progressing on that new lot. Rev. J. E. King says that he hopes to begin to hold services there by November 1st. The parish school has opened with 60 pupils."⁴ On November 30, 1900 the *Raleigh Times* announced that the church would have services on December 2. The moved building "has been thoroughly renovated and repaired which virtually makes it new."⁵

¹ North Carolina Session Laws 1868-69, Chapter 51.

² Carl Elrod DeVane, "Historical Sketch of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church." unpublished typescript, June 20, 1965. p.3

³ "Move a Church and School." *The Raleigh Times*, Tuesday, May 15, 1900.

⁴ "Work on the Parish Hall." *The Raleigh Times*, Saturday, October 6, 1900.

⁵ "Service in New Church." *The Raleigh Times* Friday November 30, 1900.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

The 1903 Sanborn map places St. Ambrose Church (Colored) on south Wilmington between East Cabarrus and Stronach's Alley. The parcel has a one-story church, to its south a two-story dwelling, and to its northeast a one-story school building with a storage building behind the church. The campus is the same on the 1909 Sanborn map. The dwelling and storage building are noted as brick; the church frame, 18' high to eaves, with heat by stove and lights by gas. By 1914 the dwelling is subdivided off and has its own frame shed and address, 513 South Wilmington. Though the school building remains on the church parcel, it is labeled D for dwelling.

This first church was a frame, Carpenter Gothic-style building. It was clad in board and batten siding and had a steep, front-gabled roof. The double-leaf entrance doors had a triangular transom above. There were two diamond-shaped cased openings centered above the entrance. Lancet windows were set along the side elevations. The interior had a small inset vestibule with doors on all four sides. The nave had a central aisle with wooden pews on either side. At the chancel the pews were set perpendicular to those in the nave. The sanctuary was centered on the rear wall. Undated historic photographs taken of the church at the Wilmington Street address show the dwelling and school.⁶

Having moved to the new site, the church was eager for growth and had numerous fundraising efforts. By 1910 news reports anticipated a new building. "work is to begin on a new church, the material to be brick with stone trimmings. The style of the building will be the Gothic and the seating capacity will be 450. The cost will approximate \$17,500. Mr. H. P. S. Keller is the architect and his plans are for a very attractive building, the church having an admirable site for this at the corner of south Wilmington and east Cabarrus Streets."⁷ Despite the fundraising, plans and publicity, it appears this new building was never constructed.

In 1946 *The News and Observer* again reports on plans for a new church building. "Church officials, " it stated, "feel that the present structure is inadequate to accommodate those who wish to worship there. Built to meet the needs of 125 people, which include the first students of St. Augustine's College, the present congregation of 400 find the building inadequate as to size and comfort."⁸

In 1959 the General Assembly passed a law entitled *An Act To Convey The State's Interest In A Tract Of Land Used By Saint Ambrose Episcopal Church For Religious Purposes*. Acknowledging a school had operated on the site but that had closed as public schools proliferated, the law granted the land to St. Ambrose church in fee simple for \$10, giving the congregation a clear title.⁹ In 1961 the church purchased a parcel even further south than Wilmington and Cabarrus, from the heirs of Ethel Young. However they were delayed

⁶ Unknown. Photograph of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in the collection of the North Carolina State Archives, Image N_69_3_13.

⁷ "Religious Progress." *The Raleigh Times*, Friday, September 16, 1910.

⁸ "St. Ambrose Church Plans New Building." *The News and Observer*, Thursday Morning March 21, 1946.

⁹ North Carolina Session Law 1959 Chapter 686.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

somewhat by parishioners who had hoped and expected that a new church building would be constructed on the Wilmington and Cabarrus Street parcel.¹⁰ In 1963, staff at the Department of Archives and History noted the frame church was threatened by plans to move the congregation of a new building at a new location and that the carpenter gothic church was worthy of preservation.¹¹ It was demolished in 1965.

The new church building, designed by architect Leif Valand, had a sanctuary with a seating capacity of 300 as well as office and classroom space and a kitchen. A 1964 newspaper article quotes the then rector Arthur Calloway who acknowledged the long-deferred new building, "...the construction of the new church is the dream of many parishioners and friends who have seen many building campaigns begun, only to fade out."¹² The new church building was dedicated on October 3, 1965. In 1987 an addition to the complex allowed for additional support spaces and enclosed an interior courtyard garden.

St. Ambrose in the Context of African-Americans in the Episcopal Church

From 1715 to the American Revolution, Anglicanism was the established church in North Carolina. After the revolution, the Protestant Episcopal Church emerged as the a successor to the Anglican Church. Northern states had African American Episcopal congregations as early as 1794 when St. Thomas Church, Philadelphia was received into the denomination.¹³ Prior to the Civil War, southern states did not have independent African American Episcopal Churches nor were there any ordained black Episcopal clergy in those southern states.¹⁴ Yet according to anecdotal accounts, there were a relatively large number of black Episcopalians in the antebellum south. Though information about them is sparse, it is known that some were coerced to worship by their owners. They worshiped in services on plantations, in white churches either in a separate gallery or at a separate service, or occasionally in a small separate facility. All services were under the control of white clergy and leadership.

Unlike many mainstream protestant denominations, the Episcopal Church suffered no schism as a result of the issues that lead to the Civil War¹⁵ and the church as a whole made compromises in order to maintain unity. Evangelism to African Americans was initially challenged by theological questions as to whether baptism carried with it an obligation for the slave to be manumitted.¹⁶ Once that question was confirmed in the negative, efforts to proselytize enslaved peoples grew considerably.

¹⁰ "Court Gets Church Dispute." *The News and Observer*, Thursday Morning January 26, 1961.

¹¹ "Gift for Cerebral Palsy Center Given." *The News and Observer*, Thursday Morning May 16, 1963.

¹² "Episcopalians Break Ground for New Church." *The News and Observer*, Sunday December 6, 1964.

¹³ Robert A. Bennett, "Black Episcopalians: A History From The Colonial Period To The Present." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* vol. 45 no. 3 (September 1974) p. 236.

¹⁴ J. Carleton Hayden, "After the War: The Mission and Growth of The Episcopal Church Among Blacks in The South, 1865-1877." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* vol. 42 no. 4 (December 1973): p. 408.

¹⁵ Bennett, p 238

¹⁶ Bennett, p 234

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

In North Carolina there was a concerted effort to bring African Americans into the church. Historian John Hope Franklin notes, "In the third decade of the nineteenth century, during the episcopate of Bishop Ravenscroft, many of the ministers of the Church were actively engaged in the work of providing spiritual enlightenment for Negroes."¹⁷ After Ravenscroft, Bishop Ives "was intensely interested in extending the spiritual guidance of the Church to negroes."¹⁸ Ives created an oral catechism that allowed for instruction to African Americans without violating the laws prohibiting slave literacy. The rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Raleigh, George W. Freeman, wrote a tract in 1836 entitled *The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders* that outlined the Christian responsibility of masters to nurture the spiritual life of their slaves.¹⁹ The efforts in North Carolina aligned with a pastoral letter issued in 1862 by Episcopal bishops in southern states. According to historian J. Carlton Hayden, the bishops "urged that especial attention be given to the religious instruction of the black people because 'our national life is wrapped up in their welfare. With them we stand or fall and God will not permit us to be separated in interest or in fortune.' " ²⁰

It is hard to gauge accurately the impact of these efforts as church records often literally did not count baptized African Americans as congregants, and reporting to the diocese was not entirely consistent from parish to parish.²¹ Efforts by the church in the south even after the Civil War largely "perpetuated the notion of intrinsic black inferiority and encouraged Episcopalians in the South to seek solutions to the fulfillment of the Great Commission only within the parameters set by racial segregation."²²

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, founded in 1868, was one of the first independent African American Episcopal churches in North Carolina. St. Cyprian's Church, originally a mission of Christ Church, New Bern, organized in 1866 as an independent entity.²³ The establishment of these churches and their continued growth came at a time when many southern African-American Christians left the Episcopal Church to join other dominations. "It has been estimated that in some southern states 90% of the Black Episcopalians left to become African Methodist Episcopalians or Colored-now Christian-Methodist Episcopalians."²⁴ Historian George Freeman Bragg characterized it as "a wholesale exodus of colored people."²⁵ J. Carlton Hayden describes the movement noting that African Americans "flocked to churches where they would be free from white domination. Black churches made possible black leadership."²⁶

¹⁷ John Hope Franklin, "Negro Episcopalians in Ante-Bellum North Carolina." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* vol. 13 no. 3 (September 1944), p.220.

¹⁸ Franklin, p. 221.

¹⁹ Graebner, N. Brooks. "The Episcopal Church and Race in Nineteenth-Century North Carolina." *Anglican and Episcopal History*, vol. 78 no. 1 (March 2009): p 87.

²⁰ Hayden, p. 403.

²¹ Franklin, p 227.

²² Graebner, p 93.

²³ "Short Sketches of Historically Black Churches." <https://www.dionc.org/short-sketches-of-historically-black-churches.html>.

²⁴ Bennett, p 239

²⁵ Hayden, p. 410.

²⁶ Hayden, p. 412.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

In the antebellum church, efforts to bolster African American participation in the church were strengthened by efforts from northern clergy and organizations, notably the Freedman's Commission. The commission's early work in education was hampered by decreasing funding. Consequently their attention turned to African American Episcopal churches. "As mission schools developed into tiny congregations of black Episcopalians, the emphasis was placed on building churches and recruiting a black ministry."²⁷ In 1868 the Commission was renamed the Commission of Home Missions to Colored People. It was then recommended that the commission focus on outreach to former black communicants to see how they might be re-connected to the church and to "prepare black clergy to minister to black people."²⁸

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church had its origins in a school that was developed by the Freedman's Commission and benefitted from the actions of this effort by the National Church, prompted largely by northern whites, to educate newly emancipated slaves and to build the denomination among African Americans in the south. However the endurance and growth of the church has largely been a product of strong African American lay and ordained leadership. Early congregants included Charles Wesley Hoover who represented Wake County in the General Assembly during the Reconstruction Era, and was a Raleigh City Alderman in addition to serving as Senior Warden of St. Ambrose.²⁹

In the 1930s their rector George Fisher protested segregated seating in the newly constructed Memorial Auditorium and helped organize an interfaith boycott by African American clergy of the dedication. He spoke out about disparities in recreational opportunities between blacks and whites. And he attempted to introduce a slate of black delegates to the Wake County Democratic Convention. A 1936 newspaper article noted that while St. Ambrose was not the largest black church in Raleigh, it was considered the most radical "What can be considered as the most militant church organization here is the St. Ambrose Episcopal Church. ...under the leadership of Rev. George Fisher, known in the city as one of the most militant preachers of the State."³⁰

Fisher was called to another parish. However St. Ambrose did not shrink from his vocal leadership and called him to return in the late 1940s. He worked closely with the local chapter of the NAACP to challenge school segregation first at the Law School at the University of North Carolina, and later in the Raleigh public schools with parishioners Ralph and June Campbell. Fisher served as president of the Raleigh Citizens Association and used his bully pulpit to protest discriminatory hiring practices in state government. During his tenure the church was elevated from mission to parish status in the Episcopal church, the first African American congregation in North Carolina to do so.

The church was served briefly by Joseph Green, who, before leaving to work at St. Augustine's University, secured a clean title for the church to the lot at Wilmington and Cabarrus. Arthur

²⁷ Hayden, p. 419.

²⁸ Hayden, p. 420.

²⁹ "Negro Legislator Dies in Raleigh." *The News and Observer*, Saturday Morning December 15, 1934.

³⁰ H. I. Fontellio-Nanton. "Churches Wield Great Influence." *The News and Observer*, Sunday Morning March 1, 1936.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

Calloway, who succeeded Green in the late 1950s, continued the tradition of leadership. He was appointed by the mayor of Raleigh to serve on a commission to examine responses to student sit down strikes. He continued the support of the Campbell family in their efforts to integrate Raleigh City Schools. He pressed the City of Raleigh to adopt non-discriminatory hiring practices. And he served three terms on the Raleigh City Council. Calloway ultimately moved the church from Wilmington and Cabarrus to its new home in the Rochester Heights neighborhood.

The church has continued at this location through the present day. The offshoot of a school organized by a commission of the national Episcopal Church in the wake of the Civil War, it is a rare surviving African American Episcopal congregation from that era. According to an article in *The News and Observer*, "Less than half of the historically black Episcopal churches founded in North Carolina after the end of the Civil War still exist ... Although the six oldest churches survive, others lasted a few decades or only a few years."³¹

St. Ambrose in the Context of Mid-Century Church Architecture

St. Ambrose is one of three Episcopal churches built in the mid-twentieth century in Raleigh designed by Leif Valand. It reflects several characteristics of mid-century trends in ecclesiastical architecture including its location away from the downtown area towards a suburban population and in areas with space for ample parking, the use of modern materials such as laminated trusses which allowed for a large open volume of space in the sanctuary, and the semiotic signaling of monumental scale symbols integrated into the architecture.

Leif Valand was born September 8, 1911 in Norway. He emigrated to the United States in 1917 and lived in New Jersey. Valand studied at the Pratt Institute and earned a Bachelor's in Architecture from New York University. He practiced architecture in Westchester County, New York. His work with American Homes, Inc. brought him into contact with builder Ed Richards, and eventually Raleigh developer Willie York. Valand moved to Raleigh in 1947 when York hired him to design the Cameron Village complex which included 65 stores, 566 apartments, 100 single family residences, and 112 offices, the majority of which Valand designed over the course of years.

Throughout his career he continued to design housing and shopping complexes, primarily in Raleigh. Most of this work seems to stem from his close relationship with a handful of prominent developers. Valand also designed a number of corporate offices, government buildings, private residences, schools, recreation buildings, hotels and churches. In 1969 he partnered with Nelson Benzing forming Leif Valand and Associates, later Valand Benzing and Associates. He retired in 1974, and died in 1985 at the age of 73.

³¹ Jackson, Drew. "Accounts of black congregations bring Episcopal history alive." *The News and Observer*, February 21, 2016 08:12 PM, Updated February 22, 2016 01:41 AM
<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/counties/wake-county/article61687357.html>.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

There are five Raleigh churches associated with Valand. The latest, Manley Street United Church of Christ was built in 1972 after his association with Benzing, so the design cannot be confidently attributed to Valand. Ridge Road Baptist Church of 1957 was built in a traditional classical revival style. It is clad in brick veneer with compass-headed windows, a monumental pedimented portico supported by Doric columns, and a graduated steeple centered on the gabled roof.

A departure from this traditional style of church architecture are his three Episcopal churches, built within a span of a decade: St. Michael's Episcopal Church (1955); St. Savior's, later known as St. Timothy's Episcopal Church (1957); and St. Ambrose Episcopal Church (1965). The first of these was Valand's own parish where he was active and served on the vestry. His commission for the building may also stem from the fact that the 8 acre site was donated by Mary Smedes York and her husband Willie York, for whom Valand had designed, and continued to design, the build out for the massive Cameron Village development.

The postwar building boom seen across the country as well as in Raleigh spurred new suburban subdivisions fueled in part by federal funding and a strong post war economy. Church building grew during this period as well. "In 1947, \$126 million was spent on churches; by 1953 this number had almost quadrupled, to just under half a billion dollars."³² New church buildings followed population growth away from the center city to parcels that allowed for enlarged spaces to support expanded ministries.

All three of Valand's Episcopal churches are located away from downtown. In 1965 Arthur Calloway, the then rector of St. Ambrose, confirmed this desire to be part of a suburban church movement. He "said population shifts and a lack of land at the Wilmington Street site forced the church to move."³³ While St. Ambrose had desired a newer, larger physical plant for some time, their move was not to another lot in the downtown grid but to a multi- acre, undeveloped site adjacent to the Rochester Heights subdivision, platted in 1956-8 and one of the few midcentury subdivisions in Raleigh open to African Americans. The parcel allowed room for expansion, and on-site parking. It was also immediately adjacent to a community, many of whom were part of its congregation.

St. Ambrose's complex was a departure from its earlier building and "modern" in a number of ways. First by having flexible support spaces for education, meetings, and programming, and by designing the complex to easily accommodate later additions, it responded to a new concept of church that expanded beyond a space for worship to a larger campus for education and outreach, with parking capacity for an expanded range of activities.

During the postwar period numerous organizations devoted to church architecture were established such as the Church Architecture Guild of America (later Guild for Religious Architecture), Committee on Religious Architecture of the American Institute of Architects, and

³² Gretchen Buggeln, *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, p. xxii

³³ "St. Ambrose to Dedicate its New Church." *The News and Observer*, Sunday October 3, 1965.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

American Society for Church Architecture.³⁴ These groups as well as religious organizations sponsored numerous conferences and publications that addressed church architecture. Notable published designs by Frank Lloyd Wright and Eero Saarinen from the late 1940s and early 1950s popularized the A-frame form.

Valand's Episcopal churches are large A-frame churches, clad in brick, constructed with laminated wood trusses. They have spare and minimal ornament, but do include monumental symbolic gestures primarily in the form of colossal ornamental crosses dominating the facades. In her book *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America* Grethen Buggeln describes the A-Frame church as "a building whose dominant shape was a triangle, having a steeply pitched roof that often rested on low side walls. The gable end of these buildings almost always fronted the street, a dominant facade that became a familiar sight along the main thoroughfares of suburban neighborhoods."³⁵ The churches were often built with the relatively new technology of laminated wood trusses. "Laminated trusses brought the overall cost of construction down considerably by eliminating complicated joinery; the joint, or bends in the frame, were molded right into the truss. The truss bore the weight of the roof down to the ground, eliminating the need for load-bearing side walls."³⁶

Buggeln also notes that the adaptability of the form and ability to phase construction helped fuel the popularity of the form. "A-frame churches are identified by the triangular elevation and rectangular plan of their sanctuaries. The rest of the church plant was also standardized, most frequently consisting of low, one-story wing(s) that contained classrooms, offices, and social spaces. These wings were easily added or enlarged, appealing to congregations that required staged building."³⁷

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in its location, physical plant, design, and construction materials is a good example of trends in the postwar suburban church movement in America. It is a significant work of ecclesiastical architecture by Raleigh architect Leif Valand.

³⁴ Buggeln, p 2

³⁵ Buggeln, p. 86.

³⁶ Buggeln, p. 88.

³⁷ Buggeln, p. 100.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

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St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC

County and State

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St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

_____ designated a National Historic Landmark
 _____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 _____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 _____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
 Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): WA8136

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.96

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 35.756558 Longitude: -78.6250139

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property are those of Wake County North Carolina tax parcel #1713102584 as illustrated in the map entitled, "St. Ambrose Episcopal Church Wake County NC 813 Darby Street Raleigh National Register Boundary Map"

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary contains all of that parcel historically associated with the property.

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Mary Ruffin Hanbury
organization: Hanbury Preservation Consulting
street & number: PO Box 6049
city or town: Raleigh state: NC zip code: 27628
e-mail maryruffin@hanburypreservation.com
telephone: 919 828 1905
date: 11 January 2019

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

City or Vicinity: Raleigh

County: Wake

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Mary Ruffin Hanbury

Date Photographed: June 26, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 19: Exterior of Church Facade, camera facing north
- 2 of 19 Exterior of Church Facade, camera facing northeast
- 3 of 19 Exterior of Church West Elevation, camera facing northeast
- 4 of 19 Exterior of Church West Elevation, camera facing east
- 5 of 19 Exterior of Church North Elevation, camera facing southeast
- 6 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, camera facing south
- 7 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, camera facing south
- 8 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, camera facing southwest
- 9 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, Altar, camera facing north
- 10 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, Dossal, camera facing north
- 11 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, Credence Table, camera facing north
- 12 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, Lectern, camera facing northeast
- 13 of 19 Interior of Church, Sanctuary, Chancel, camera facing north
- 14 of 19 Exterior of Church, Courtyard, camera facing southwest
- 15 of 19 Interior of Church, Hall, camera facing east

St. Ambrose Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Wake County, NC
County and State

- 16 of 19 Interior of Church, Chapel, camera facing east
- 17 of 19 Interior of Church, Vestry Room, camera facing north
- 18 of 19 Interior of Church, Parish Hall, camera facing northwest
- 19 of 19 Interior of Church, Hall, camera facing north

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

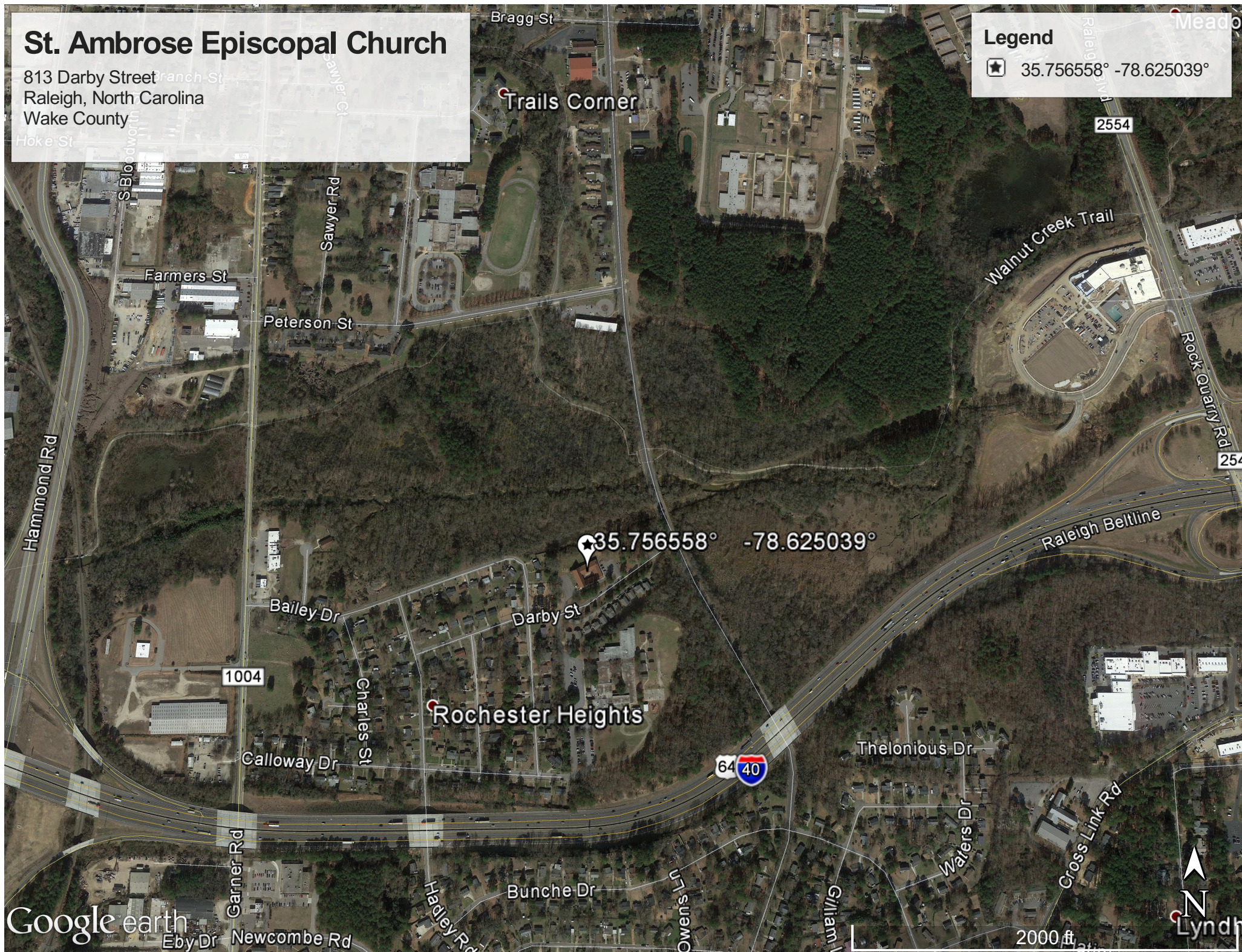
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

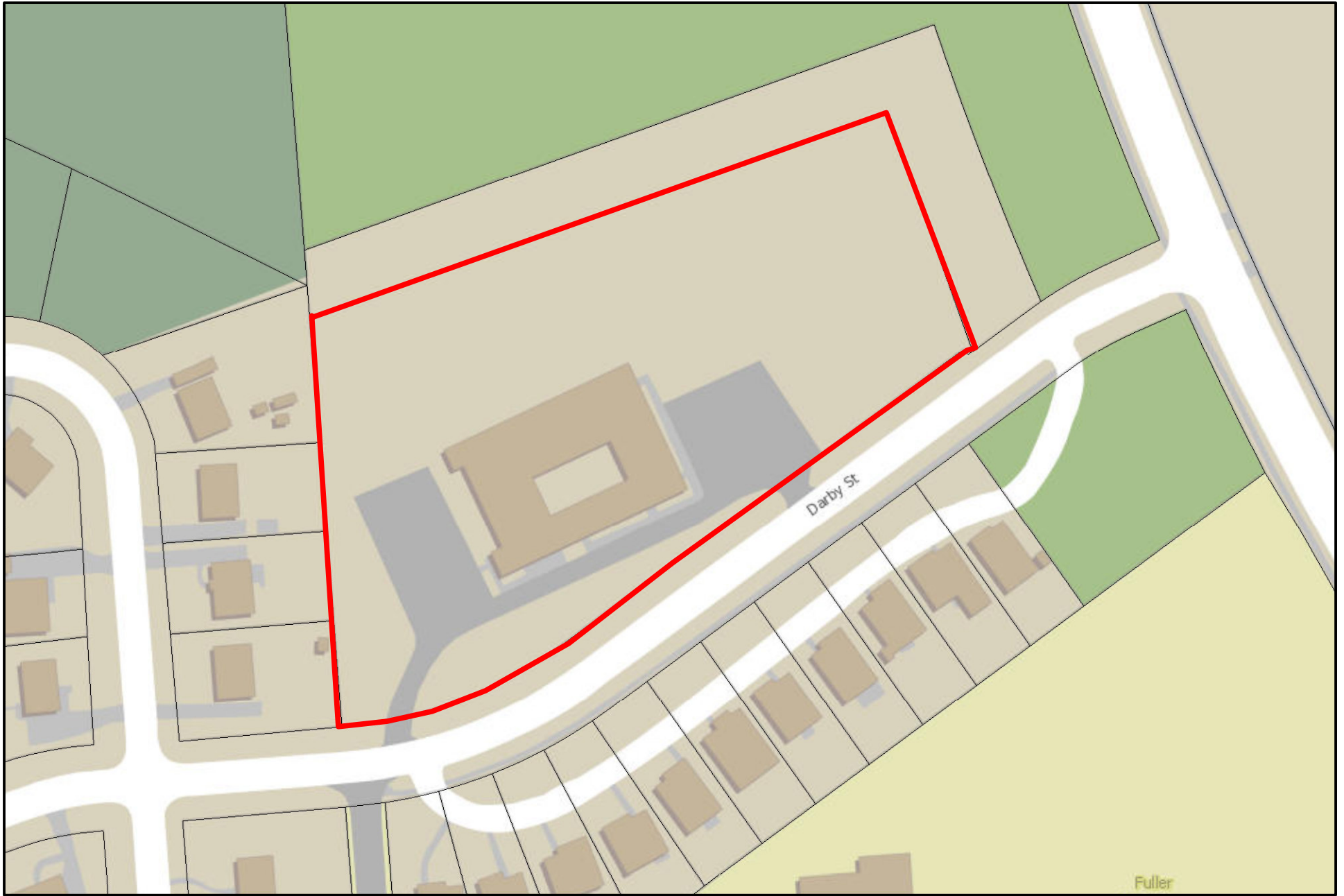
St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

813 Darby Street
Raleigh, North Carolina
Wake County

Legend

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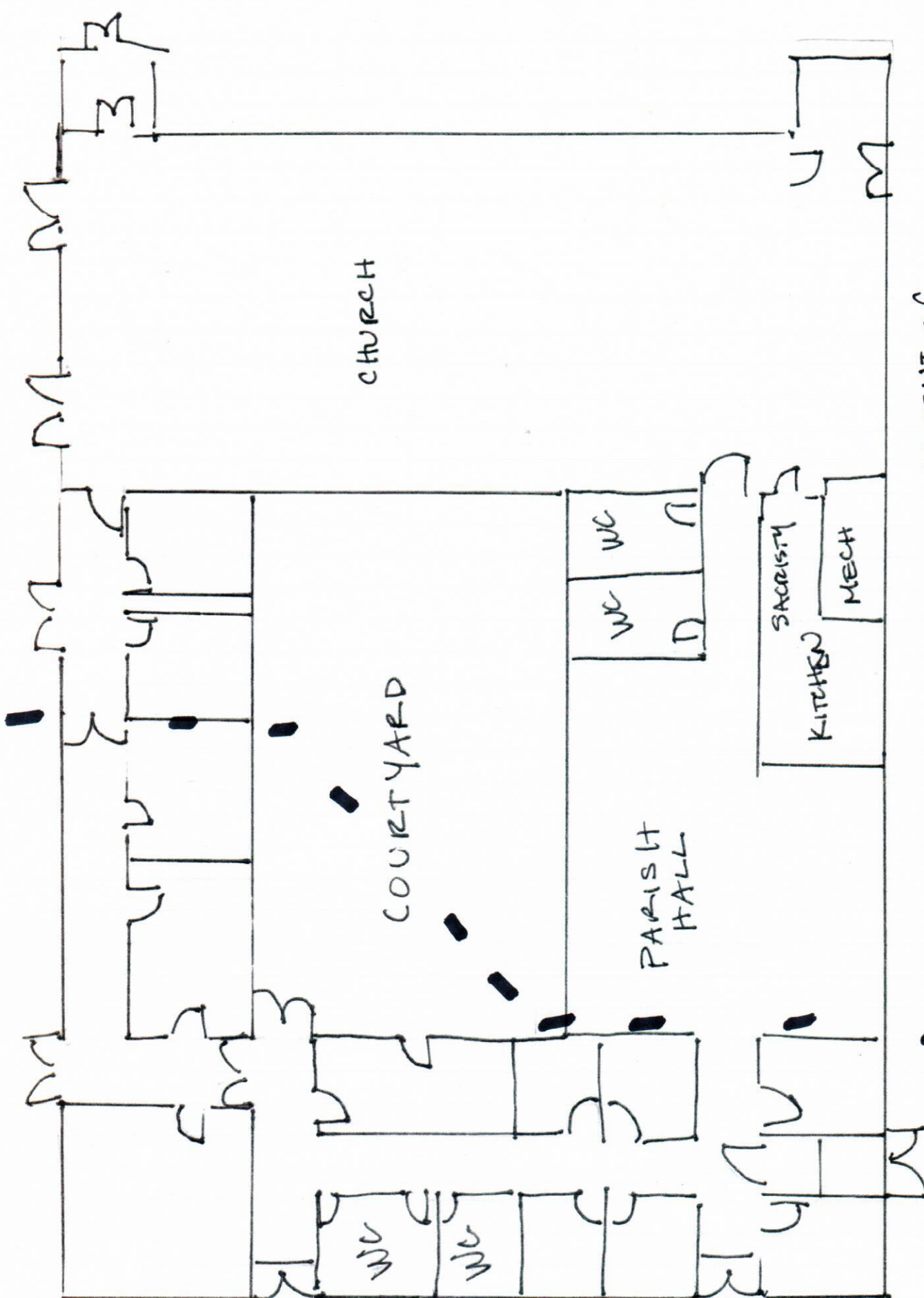


St. Ambrose Episcopal Church Wake County, NC 813 Darby Street Raleigh National Register Boundary Map



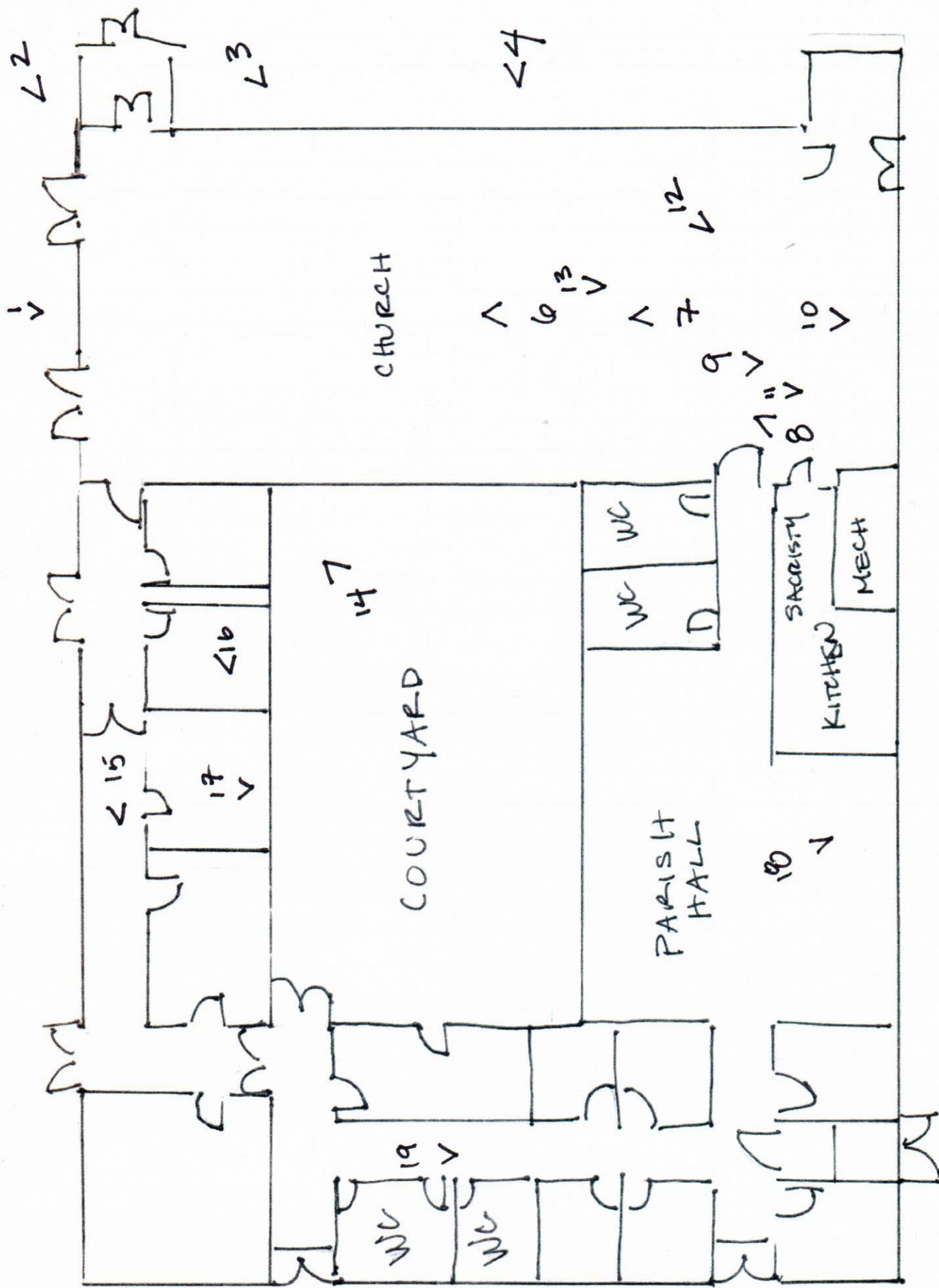
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1 inch = 100 feet

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NORTH
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 EXTENT OF
 ORIGINAL
 CONSTRUCTION
 WEST OF DOTTED
 LINE)

ST AMBROSE, WAKE COUNTY NC
 813 DARBY ST. RALEIGH PLAN



ST AMBROSE, WAKE COUNTY NC
 813 DARBY ST. RALEIGH
 PHOTO KEY
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