

Church hist.
Old Brick

Memorandum

To: Mr. Robert Patrick, Moderator Catawba Presbytery
From: See "Points of contact"
CC: Dr. Guy H. Smith, Jr., Stated Clerk/Administrator Catawba Presbytery
Date: 3/9/2007
Subject: Ebenezer ARP Church ("The Old Brick Church")
Ref.: Ltr Bethel ARP Church reference custodial and financial responsibilities for the Old Brick Church dtd 2/18/07.

Purpose. This memorandum provides information and recommendations on the state of maintenance and preservation of Ebenezer ARP Church (The Old Brick Church) and its cemetery. It is also intended to facilitate the transfer of custodial duties from Bethel ARP to Catawba Presbytery.

Background. An article by John Bigham in the "Sandlapper" magazine, August 1974 states that in the fall of 1972 Catawba Presbytery took action to ensure Ebenezer ARP ("The Old Brick Church") would not be forgotten in an historic or religious sense. Mr. Bigham's article appeared on the occasion of Synod's observing the 170th anniversary of its founding at the site of the church which was built in 1788. In 1972 the church was reinstated on the rolls of Presbytery as a house of worship, though not as an active congregation. It is assumed that Bethel ARP's custodial duties for the church were formalized at that time. Ebenezer ARP was an active congregation until 1920. In its final years as active it was a joint congregation with Bethel ARP in Winnsboro. Ebenezer's congregation was served by the Pastor of Bethel ARP. On August 19, 1971 Ebenezer was entered on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a popular tourist stop for visitors to Fairfield County. The church is located along SC Hwy 213 in the western part of the county approximately 14 miles from Winnsboro, the county seat.

Ownership. Catawba Presbytery's authority to dispose of the property is presumably established in The Form of Government, Chapter XII paragraph B.f. The only deed on hand conveyed the property in 1793 from Henry Crumpton to members of the Associate Congregation of the Brick Church Meeting House (ref. Fairfield County Clerk of Court Deed Book H pp. 171-172).

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Custodial care. The basic state of repair for the building and cemetery upkeep is satisfactory. Church pews, railings and windows are in satisfactory repair. The church interior is clean, adequately painted and in general, presentable for services. The metal roof and window shutters installed in 2005 are protecting the interior from the elements. As required, the services of a local person are secured to make minor repairs and periodic cleaning. The most recent repair was the replacement of several windows broken by vandalism. The shutters were installed to aid protection of windows.

During the growing season the church and cemetery grounds are maintained by a local yard service. This service includes cutting and removing of grass, vines and other growth within the rock wall surrounding the grounds. Minor repairs are done to some of the old grave markers damaged by accident or in rare cases vandalism. Families with ancestral ties to Ebenezer membership are permitted burial privileges. Most recently the Macfie family, formerly of Winnsboro, has buried kin in the cemetery. The family established and generously contributes to a cemetery fund currently managed by Bethel.

The aforementioned custodial care is presently coordinated by Bethel's Clerk of Session. Over a number of years Meredith ("Snooks") Chappell has rendered faithful and excellent service in that capacity and duty.

Structural status. On February 21st, 2007 three elders of Bethel (see below) met at Ebenezer with Mr. Richard Sidebottom, SC Department of Archives and History. Purpose of the meeting was to get Mr. Sidebottom's assessment on the structural and preservation status of the church as well as to explore options for public funds to support those concerns. Several aspects of structural repair were identified as important to the preservation of the church and property. As with any building, water infiltration is the main issue. The church and cemetery sit on a sloped lot surrounded by a wall of large granite stones. Runoff water from the site and roof are channeled to the foundation of the building. Pictures are on hand that depict several inches of soil loss over the past few years at these points. This erosion has led to poor drainage from the building allowing water to remain at the base of the building rather than continuing away from the foundation. In several points around the building a cement-based mortar was used to repair spacing between bricks and stones. This mortar is too hard for the historic brick. The cement mortar does not "breathe" and has forced moisture through the softer texture of the bricks. Over time these bricks have eroded. The front door jamb (exterior) on the right side door is rotten at the bottom. The rock steps to the rear entrance to the church have sunk slightly. The wooden window frames on the outside are sound but should be properly stripped, repaired, and painted. Window frames have been painted over the years without comprehensive preparation work, which has obscured historic details.

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The church had tie rods installed at the base of the roof some time ago. A gap seems to have developed between the end of one roof truss and the plaster wall, but it is not known whether the gap is stable or an active sign of movement.

The rock wall around the property requires repair. Several of the large granite stones have been dislodged by the root system of trees around and near the wall. In 2000 Bethel tried to contact the owner of the contiguous property to get permission to remove the trees. That attempt was not successful. An estimate to repair the wall was obtained. The proposed cost of the repair was \$9,450.

On the subject of preservation, Mr. Sidebottom recommends seeking public funds to have a Historic Structure Report compiled. Annually the State Historic Preservation Office awards on a competitive basis preservation planning grants that could be used for a Historic Structures Report. Matching funds would be required of Presbytery and the grant would need to be awarded through the local government (Fairfield County). The historic structure report is an optimal first phase of historic preservation efforts for a significant building, providing design and implementation of its rehabilitation and preservation. Much of the history, significance, and condition of the property needed to support the request is available. The report would guide selection of an appropriate treatment, the development of work recommendations and help focus Synod-wide attention on the need to preserve this vital part of our ARP heritage.

Funds. Presently, the cemetery fund has a balance of \$83.91; the general fund \$1,554.81. Annual custodial care expenses are estimated to be \$2,240. Other expenses include property insurance covering structural damage repair (most recently \$420), annual termite inspection and event preparation. Funds for custodial care are provided by Catawba Presbytery and individual donations. Funds are currently managed by the Bethel Clerk of Session. Funds from Presbytery are provided on the occasion of Synod services held at the church and on request to meet remedial repairs. Contributions are generally in the form of memorial gifts.

Recommendations.

- a. Establish a budget at Presbytery or Synod to fund custodial care. The procedure of irregularly providing custodial funds complicates planning and imposes an administrative burden on the provider.
- b. Pursue development of a Historic Structure Report. The structural concerns cited for the church and granite wall are profound.
- c. Establish Synod functional responsibility for the preservation and promotion of records and accounts of Ebenezer's history. Functional adoption by the Synod Historian appears to be an appropriate office.

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- d. Elevate and promote among Synod awareness and support of Ebenezer's historic importance to our ARP heritage. Use of the "ARP" and the Synod Web site with links to several available sources of historical data and pictures is recommended.

Other References.

- a. South Carolina Department of Archives and History
<http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/fairfield/S10817720010/index.htm>
- b. The Library of Congress: American Memory home
Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record
<http://memory.loc.gov/>
- c. Fairfield County Museum
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~scfairfi/ebenezer.html>
- d. Other pictures and historic data are available through Elder John Swearingen (see below).

Points of contact. Bethel ARP contacts are Clerk of Session Roger Rowe (803-712-1340), Elder John Swearingen (803-635-1274) and Elder John Johnson (803 635-9200). Richard Sidebottom can be contacted at (803 896-6199).