

Sugaw Creek School House & Associated Properties



This report was written on September 1, 1976

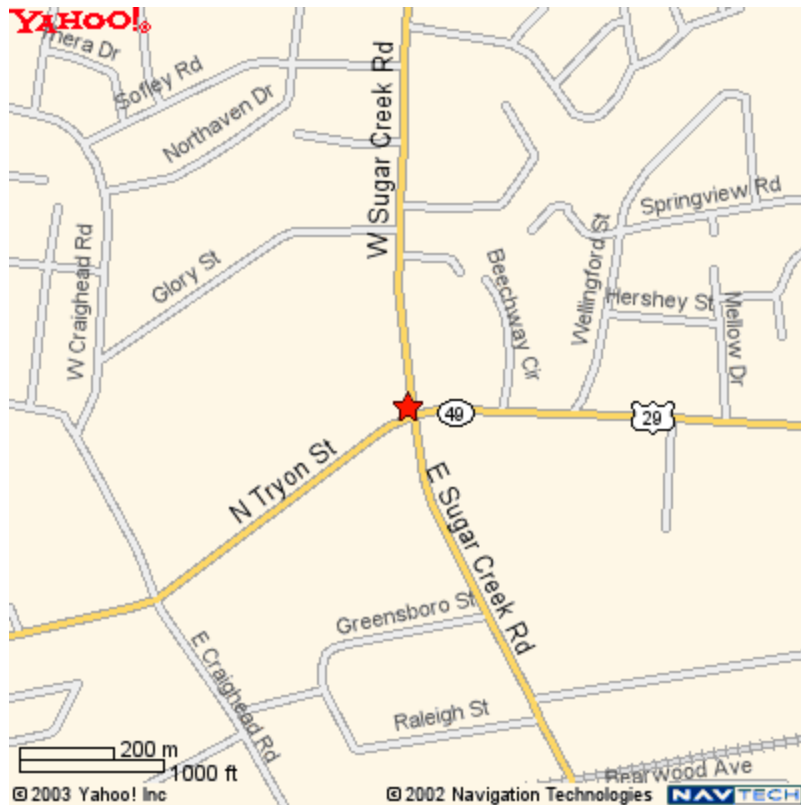
1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Sugaw Creek School House is located on the grounds of the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church at 101 Sugar Creek Rd. W., Charlotte, N.C. 28213.

2. Name, addresses, and telephone numbers of the present owners and occupants of the property: The present owner and occupant of the property:
Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church
101 Sugar Creek Rd., W.
Charlotte, N.C. 28213

Telephone: 596-4487

3. Representative photographs of the property: Representative photographs of the property are included in this report.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent reference to this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1 (New) at Page 174. The Parcel Number of the property is 08701115.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

The Sugaw Creek School House was built in 1837 by Mr. Gillett, a Frenchman, who was assisted by several young men of the congregation. The structure, erected during the pastorate of Rev. John Madison McKnitt Caldwell, replaced a log school house which had become too small to accommodate an expanding enrollment. In this building many boys acquired the academic preparation necessary for entry into Davidson College, the newly-established Presbyterian college in the northern section of Mecklenburg County. The school maintained high standards. The first full-time teacher was Robert I. McDowell, an honor graduate of Hampton-Sydney College. The school continued to operate until the early years of this century, when the public schools began to assume the responsibilities associated with educating the youth of the Sugaw Creek community. In 1960 the women of Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church converted the building into the Sugaw Creek Historical Museum. It is still used for that purpose today.

7. A brief architectural description of the Property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in NCGS 160A-399.4:

a. Historical and cultural significance: The historical and cultural significance of the property known as the Sugaw Creek School House rests upon its association with the early educational efforts of one of the oldest Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County.

b. Suitability for reservation and restoration: The Sugaw Creek School House retains much of its exterior integrity and is therefore suitable for preservation and restoration.

c. Educational value: The Sugaw Creek School House has educational value as the oldest surviving instructional facility in Mecklenburg County. It now houses materials of educational value.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, and maintenance or repair: The Commission has no intention of purchasing this property, nor is it aware of any intention or the owner to sell. The Commission assumes that all costs associated with renovating and maintaining the property will be paid by the owner or subsequent owner of the property.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The Commission concurs with the present owner's adaptive use of the structure as a museum.

f. Appraised value: The current tax appraisal value of the structure is \$3550. The Commission is aware that designation of the property would allow the owner to apply for a special classification for purposes of Ad Valorem Taxation.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: As indicated earlier, the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Furthermore, the Commission area that all costs associated with the property will be paid by whatever party now owns or will subsequently own the property. Clearly, the present owner has demonstrated the capacity to pay the expenses associated with maintaining the structure.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission judges that the property known as the Sugaw Creek School House does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's judgment is its knowledge of the fact that the National Register of Historic Places functions to identify properties of local and State historic significance. The Commission believes that the property known as the Sugaw Creek School House is of local historic significance and thereby meets the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historical importance: As noted earlier, the property known as the Sugaw Creek School House is of local historical significance because of its association with the early educational efforts of one of the oldest Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County. Moreover, it is the oldest surviving instructional facility in Mecklenburg County.

Bibliography

An Inventory Of Older Buildings in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte for the Historic Properties Commission .

Charlotte Observer (July 16, 1933).

Charlotte Observer (April 29, 1960).

Neill Roderick McGeachy, *A History of the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church.*

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Date of Preparation of this report: September 1, 1976

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission
139 Middleton Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28207

Telephone: 332-2726:

Architectural Description

School House

The history of European emigration into the Piedmont Carolinas, and more particularly Mecklenburg County, is the story of the first Presbyterian Scotch-Irish pioneers. These staunch farmers were united not only by the challenge of this wilderness, but by their fiercely independent spirit and strong religious beliefs. They worshipped together from the first, and from their churches the county inherited a rich cultural and architectural heritage.

The first church in the county was Sugaw Creek Presbyterian, established in 1755 on land assigned by the crown to colonial land agent John Selwyn. Since the Presbyterian Church traditionally laid great emphasis on education, one wonders why the early church waited until 1806 to establish a classical school at Sugaw Creek. Be that as it may, the church fathers did start

teaching at the church in that year. This Sugaw Creek school was the only one available for children of the settlers, so it was soon necessary to build a separate log school house on the church grounds. After a scant few years the growing enrollment and increasing affluence of local planters gave rise to plans for a fine new brick school house. So in the early 1820s the church hired a skilled French builder named Gillet to design and build this new school. And today, after a century and a half, the old school house rests on its original site on the front lawn of the church, viewed by hundreds of passing motorists each day.

A large class in 1820 would have been fifteen students, so the structure is small by today's standards, measuring about 20 feet by 30 feet on the ground. A simple rectangle with plain gabled ends, the building exhibits no ornamentation or elaboration. Builder Gillet created a functional school house done strictly in the understated manner of the Federal style.

From a low field stone foundation, the solid brick exterior walls rise in typical [Flemish bond](#) coursing to the [roof](#) eaves set out with two courses of corbeled headers. At the corners are smaller brick called queen closures, also typical of the period. Above the eaves a small molded strip supports the end of slightly cantilevered [wood shingles](#). The present roof surface is sawn cedar shingles, though originally the roof was likely hand riven cypress shingles.

The long axis of the building runs generally north-south and at the north gabled end a large fireplace is centered in a solid brick wall built integrally with a small chimney. On the long west wall is at entrance door centered between single six light over six light [windows](#). Neither the door nor windows are original. However, one could assume that these units were typical of the period and could be accurately restored.

On the opposite long east wall are two additional windows similar to those on the west. In the center of this wall is evidence that there was an additional exterior entrance door on the east side at one time. This could possibly indicate that the interior of the school house, which is now one large room, was originally divided by an off-set partition into several chambers.

The south gabled end of the building exhibits evidence of severe past damage and has been essentially replaced with more recent brick. It is said that the building suffered heavy damage during the earthquake which struck the county in the 1880s. This possibly explains the damage in the south wall and the several other wall cracks in the exterior. There are cast iron plates high in the corners of outside walls connected to earthquake rods, which were probably added at that time.

The interior of the building has been extensively remodeled and shows little of the original materials -- other than some wide pine floor boards. There are no exposed framing members in the floor, ceiling or roof at present. If these elements in the building retain original characteristics, the historic nature of the structure would be better understood and appreciated if certain portions of this work and material were put on display.

This small Federal structure is no doubt unique in the county and possibly in the state. While there is much in the school house now which does not accurately reflect the original building, the

essential characteristic can be determined from that which has been preserved. And with sensitive restoration an historic architectural treasure would be created.

SUGAW CREEK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CEMETERY #1

West Craighead Road
Tax parcel #08511506

There are three close but separated graveyards associated with this church, their locations reflecting successive changes in the church building's site over the centuries. This cemetery is the first known cemetery for Sugaw Creek Presbyterian, established in 1755. Sugaw Creek is the oldest church in Mecklenburg County, the mother church for the seven original Presbyterian congregations in Mecklenburg County established before the Revolutionary War.

Burials on the church grounds date from the time of the Reverend Alexander Craighead, Sugaw Creek's first settled pastor and the fiery minister who preached freedom from England to the settlers. Indeed, the first known grave at cemetery #1 is that of Reverend Alexander Craighead who died in 1766. The grave, according to tradition, was marked by two sassafras trees that grew from the poles used to carry his coffin from the church to the graveyard and were then thrust into the ground to mark the spot. The poles took root and grew to be large trees. A storm about one hundred and twenty-five years later uprooted one and the other was broken off about twenty feet above the ground. One piece of the wood was used to make the top of the pulpit used in the church until recently. It is now in the Sugaw Creek Museum. Today there is a granite marker over the grave and it is enclosed in a small iron fence.

Jean Wallis, mother of Reverend James Wallis of Providence Presbyterian Church, is buried here (1792-1819). David Robinson, father of Reverend John Robinson of Poplar Tent Presbyterian Church, is buried here (1724-1808).

The tombstone listing by Ralph Kiser made in 1937 has been compared with the record of Mrs. J. S. Welborn, "North Carolina Tombstone Records" made in 1935 and W. Michael Biggers' "Cemetery Inscriptions, 1750-1850" made in approximately 1966. This listing is now used as the only existing list of tombstones in cemetery #1. It shows forty-eight tombstones dated from 1766 to 1836, thirty-four of which are from the 18th century.

A stone wall encloses the cemetery and it has become necessary in recent times to install a chain link fence around the cemetery for protection of the property.

SUGAW CREEK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CEMETERY #2

4130 North Tryon Street
Tax parcel #09108109

Sometime after the death of Alexander Craighead in 1766, the Sugar Creek Church building was changed from near the first graveyard to a site nearer the creek and east of the Salisbury Road (North Tryon Street). This building stood north of what is now designated as cemetery #2. J. B.

Alexander in his *History of Mecklenburg County, from 1740 to 1900* says, "The building which occupied a part of the graveyard,... was the second house built by the congregation."

Two signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, Hezekiah Alexander (1728-1801) and Abraham Alexander (1717-1786) are buried in cemetery #2. The Reverend Samuel C. Caldwell (1768-1826) is also buried here.

With a substantial number of burials from the era of the American Revolution, both cemetery #1 and #2 preserve the funerary record of many prominent Scots-Irish settlers.

The tombstone listing by Ralph Kiser made in 1937 has been compared with the record of Mrs. J. S. Welborn, "North Carolina Tombstone Records" made in 1935 and W. Michael Biggers. "Cemetery Inscriptions, 1750-1850" made in approximately 1966. This listing is now used as the only existing list of tombstones in cemetery #2. It shows two hundred ninety-seven listings dating from 1786 to 1888.

The cemetery is surrounded by the original "Scottish" piled [stone wall](#) approximately four feet wide by two feet high. In recent years it became necessary to enclose the cemetery with a chain link fence located immediately inside the stone wall. There are also hand hewn stone steps leading to the north cemetery entrance.

SUGAW CREEK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CEMETERY #3

100 Sugar Creek Road West
Tax parcel #08901204

The third Sugaw Creek cemetery covers 3.395 acres and is located directly across Sugar Creek Road from the present church building at the corner of Sugar Creek Road West and North Tryon Street.

The tombstone listing by Ralph Kiser made in 1937 has been compared with the record of Mrs. J. S. Welborn, "North Carolina Tombstone Records" made in 1935. This listing is now used as the only existing list of tombstones in cemetery #3. It lists several hundred tombstones dated from the mid 1800's to the present. This is the cemetery still in use today for church burials.

The cemetery is surrounded by the original wrought iron fence with mortared stone entrances. There is a stone historic marker in front of the cemetery commemorating a Revolutionary War skirmish.