

# 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. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Machpelah Presbyterian Church

other names/site number N/A

## 2. Location

street & number 226 Brevard Place Road

not for publication N/A

city or town Iron Station

vicinity

state North Carolina

code NC

county Lincoln

zip code 28080

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this  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  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  local

Signature of certifying official

Date

North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer  
Title

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

## 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

Machpelah Presbyterian Church  
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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public – Local
- public – State
- public – Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Total</b>

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/Religious Facility

FUNERARY/Cemetery

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/Religious Facility

FUNERARY/Cemetery

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY/Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Stone

walls: Brick

Stucco

roof: Wood – Shake

other:

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINATED PROPERTY**

Built in 1848, Machpelah Presbyterian Church is a highly intact example of a mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival-style brick church located at 226 Brevard Place Road, Iron Station, Lincoln County, North Carolina. Situated in eastern Lincoln County, the area surrounding the church is rural and wooded, except for cleared lots for the single-family homes and mobile homes that dot the landscape. The church retains its historical associations with Machpelah Cemetery (Contributing Site), which was established prior to the church in 1801 and is located roughly 220 feet northeast of the church towards the intersection of Brevard Place Road and Old Plank Road.<sup>1</sup> The cemetery is enclosed by an early nineteenth-century dry-stacked stone wall that was expanded at an unknown date, with the marble and granite gravemarkers aligned in the Christian tradition, oriented east–west. Machpelah Cemetery contains burials dating from 1801 to 2014. The one-and-one-half-story, front-gable church is roughly 1,200 square feet in size. Minor changes have been made to the church: the brick exterior was painted white in the 1950s, operable but period-appropriate shutters were installed in 2006, and a wood shingle roof was installed in April 2024. Overall, these alterations do not detract from the building’s character-defining features, such as its simple symmetrical form, its Flemish bond brick exterior and original windows and doors, and its highly intact interior with original floors, plaster walls, Greek Revival window trim, altar, and pews. Machpelah Presbyterian Church remains relatively unchanged since its consecration in 1848, and it retains high degrees of all seven aspects of integrity.

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**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINATED PROPERTY**

**SETTING AND OVERVIEW**

Situated in eastern Lincoln County, Machpelah Presbyterian Church is located at 226 Brevard Place Road in Iron Station, Lincoln County, North Carolina. The property lies approximately 10 miles east of Lincoln County’s seat of Lincolnton, and roughly 20 miles northwest of downtown Charlotte. The area immediately surrounding Machpelah Presbyterian Church is predominantly wooded but single-family homes and mobile homes are present in the area. Generally, Machpelah Presbyterian Church retains its historic rural setting.

The Machpelah Presbyterian Church legal parcel encompasses approximately 24.5 acres of land that straddles Brevard Place Road near its intersection with Old Plank Road to the east. The church stands at a high point in the area, conveying its prominence. From the church, the land slopes slightly to the east towards Machpelah Cemetery and slightly south towards Brevard Place Road. Fourteen acres of the northern section of the parcel are heavily wooded. Both the church and cemetery are set back roughly 60 feet from the north side of Brevard Place Road, with the cemetery lying approximately 220 feet northeast of the church. The visual and historical connections between Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery are significant features of the property. The church and cemetery are separated by a small grove of mature deciduous trees. A gravel parking area, accessible from Brevard Place Road, lies south of the church and is separated from the churchyard by a low stone wall, which mimics the church’s foundation and was built by a church benefactor around 2005 to 2006. Two stone piers, marking a grassy driveway to Machpelah Cemetery, lie 50 feet south of Machpelah Cemetery and were constructed in the mid-1990s. A brick walkway leads

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<sup>1</sup> Originally known as the “Brevard and Graham Graveyard,” the cemetery is known throughout the community as Machpelah Cemetery. This is also the name used in the local landmark report; therefore, for clarity and consistency, the name “Machpelah Cemetery” is used throughout this nomination.

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from the gravel parking area, through a break in the stone wall, and forms a brick apron at the front doors on the church's south elevation. There are two contributing resources on the property, including one contributing building (Machpelah Presbyterian Church) and one contributing site (Machpelah Cemetery).

**Machpelah Presbyterian Church  
1848**

**Contributing Building**

Exterior

Built in 1848, Machpelah Presbyterian Church embodies the rural Greek Revival-style characteristics popular in Piedmont North Carolina church architecture of the mid-nineteenth century (**Photos 1–3**). The church, characterized by its plain symmetrical form and fenestration patterns, is a simple, yet refined representation of the Greek Revival style. The church has a rectangular form that roughly measures 30 feet by 40 feet. Machpelah Presbyterian Church is oriented with its primary elevation facing south towards Brevard Place Road. The one-and-one-half-story Flemish bond brick church rests on a cut-stone foundation, and the building is capped by a front-gabled, cedar shake roof that was installed in April 2024, replacing a non-historic asphalt shingle roof. The rake boards on the gable ends are flush with the exterior walls. Only a portion of the original beaded-edge rake boards remain intact on the rear gable, with the rest replaced during the wood shingle roof installation. A brick chimney projects from the apex of the roof. Decorative brickwork is seen in the flat arches above the doors and windows throughout the building, and as the stepped and molded, four-course brick cornice on the east and west side elevations. Stucco covers the gable of the rear (north) elevation. The reasons for the circa-1930 stucco application are unknown. The church was painted white for the first time in the 1950s, and the most recent coat of paint was applied in the 1990s.

The two-bay primary (south) elevation features two original double-leaf entry doors. Each door consists of five panels with original box locks with porcelain doorknobs. The doors reflect the earliest iteration of Greek Revival-style entries with their equally sized raised panels.<sup>2</sup> Cut-stone steps lined with a metal railing enable access to the front doors.

The east and west side elevations of the church are identical to one another. Three, nine-over-nine double-hung, wood sash windows pierce the east and west elevations. Two additional windows pierce the north elevation of the church behind the pulpit. They are identical to those on the east and west side elevations, except for the stucco in the gable that obscures the jack arches. Double Hung, LLC of Greensboro, North Carolina restored all eight windows in 2014. The window surrounds are composed of beaded trim with plain corner blocks, typical of the Greek Revival style. The windowsills are made from cut stone. Operable and period appropriate louvered wood shutters were added in 2006, though it is not known for certain whether shutters were original to the 1848 building.

Interior

The 1,200-square-foot interior of Machpelah Presbyterian Church echoes the exterior's austere aesthetic, and its floor plan is typical of Presbyterian country churches of the mid-nineteenth century with a strict north–south alignment of the entry and pulpit (**Photos 4–11**). The interior consists of a single, open, and symmetrically arranged room with a gallery for enslaved congregants along the south wall above the entry. The two front doors open directly into the sanctuary, and unlike the exterior faces of the doors, the panels on the interior are plain and recessed. The church has a double-aisle plan with three sets of painted wood pews consisting of eight rows each facing north toward the altar and two sets of pews with three rows flanking the east and west sides of altar. The gallery projects over the five back (south) rows of pews, leaving the front three pews uncovered. A centered, square post interrupts the center row of pews on the ground floor and supports the gallery. Pilasters on the east and west walls support the sides of the gallery.

Original pine flooring covers the sanctuary floor, and the original plaster walls are covered with white paint. The ceiling was plastered but was covered with wood boards in the 1930s, presumably to cover damaged plaster. The

<sup>2</sup> Seth Hinshaw, *A Field Guide to American Residential Doors* (Pottstown, Pennsylvania: Old-doors.info, 2019), 41.

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present-day particle board ceiling was installed in the 1970s. The wood trim throughout the interior is original. A tall, molded baseboard runs along all four walls of the interior. The door and window trims are slightly more decorative than their exterior counterparts with fluted surrounds and plain corner blocks.

A circa-1900 wood-burning stove, produced by Gray & Dudley Company of Nashville, Tennessee, is centrally located within the sanctuary. A slender metal support column stands north of the stove. The original paneled altar is centered on the north wall. It sits on a riser which is thought to have been lowered at an unknown date given that the beadboard on the north wall and window trim has been cut away. The original wood pews have a plain, rectilinear form.

The original kite winder staircase that leads to the gallery occupies the southeast corner of the church's interior. A rounded railing with a plain, square newel post lines the top of the stair opening. A low wall lines the north edge of the gallery, which overlooks the sanctuary and altar. Once a gallery for enslaved people to partake in church services, the gallery is lined with the same original wood flooring as the ground floor, and a few pews remain in place. The same baseboard trim present on the ground level is echoed in the gallery. Electricity was installed in the building at an unknown date, and four lights were installed. Two glass ceiling lights are placed under the gallery of the ground floor and two glass pendant lights hang from the high ceiling towards the north end of the building.

**Machpelah Cemetery  
Circa 1801–2014**

**Contributing Site**

Machpelah Cemetery lies approximately 220 feet northeast of Machpelah Presbyterian Church (**Photos 12–15**).<sup>3</sup> It contains granite and marble gravemarkers including tablets, box tombs and obelisks that date from the earliest burial in 1801 to the most recent in 2014. Of the approximately 105 gravemarkers, the burial dates are widespread, with no single decade containing a notably higher number of burials. The Grahams and Brevards originally used Machpelah Cemetery as a family cemetery, but following the church's construction in 1848, it was opened to the congregation. The rectangular cemetery measures approximately 90 feet by 125 feet and is enclosed by a dry-stacked stone wall built originally by General Joseph Graham and Captain Alexander Brevard in the early nineteenth century. The cemetery's walls were enlarged, likely to the east, at an unknown date. No visible distinction exists between the original wall and the expansion, suggesting the enlargement may have occurred early in the cemetery's history. Originally, a set of stone steps on both the exterior and interior of the west cemetery wall served as the entry and exit points for the cemetery. This was a common way to access walled cemeteries prior to fence laws that corralled roving livestock that could damage gravemarkers. Two large openings in the south wall, likely added when the cemetery's wall was expanded, now enable easy access. The cemetery is covered with grass apart from the Abernathy, Reel, and Reinhardt family plots on the south side which are covered with marble rock and mulch.

Gravemarkers and monuments within Machpelah Cemetery are linearly aligned in rows that run north–south, and all burials face east in the Christian tradition. There is a total of eight rows with enough space to walk between each of the rows.

Granite and concrete coping encircle four family plots, and two Brevard family plots have marble posts at the corners which are connected by metal chains, appropriate for families who made their livings by the iron industry. Today, only a portion of chain along the east side of the plot remains intact. One Brevard plot features marble posts with flat tops and the letter “B” inscribed on each, and the other has marble posts with pointed tops resembling small obelisks.

<sup>3</sup> The description of Machpelah Cemetery was adapted from Jason Harpe's 2020 Local Landmark Report for Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery. Keith C. Seramur of Seramur & Associates, PC completed a geophysical survey and soil penetration test of Machpelah Cemetery in March 2016. The survey and tests identified anomalies of 10 unmarked graves. The area outside of the stone wall of the cemetery was not surveyed.

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The monument for Captain Alexander Brevard, Rebecca D. Brevard, Eloisa Davidson Hayne, and two of Eloisa Hayne's children is situated within one of the Brevard family plots and is enclosed by large soapstone coping.

The earliest gravemarker forms in the Machpelah Cemetery are box tombs, tablets, ledgers, obelisks, pedestal tombs, and a monument. Later gravemarkers from the mid- to late twentieth century are typically marble and granite die-on-base forms and granite or marble lawn-style markers. Many of the notable gravemarkers within the cemetery were crafted by the Caveny and White families, the stonecutting firms of L. H. Harrell of Shelby, and the Carolina Marble Works of Lincolnton.

**INTEGRITY ASSESSMENT**

Machpelah Presbyterian Church possesses a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. Located on its original site, the church is set in a largely rural landscape. The church and cemetery retain their historical visual and physical connection with one another. Machpelah Presbyterian Church retains integrity of design, workmanship, and materials through its simple, symmetrical form, exterior Flemish bond and decorative brickwork, original wood-sash windows, original paneled front doors, and few alterations. The interior remains intact and retains its original floorplan, gallery, wood floors, plaster walls, pews, and altar. The particle board ceiling, wood stove, electricity, and pendant lights that hang from the ceiling are the only interior alterations. Overall, Machpelah Presbyterian Church fully retains sufficient integrity of design, workmanship, and materials to convey its historic feeling and association as an 1848 Greek Revival-style church with a small cemetery.

**STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL**

The Machpelah Presbyterian Church was built in 1848 while its adjacent cemetery was established in 1801, and both are closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological features produced by former structures, fence lines, paths, and plantings, as well as materials that have accumulated through continued use of the church property and cemetery since the early to mid-19th century, may provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of both the property and the wider church community. Although there are no previously recorded archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity of the church and cemetery, it is possible that intact and significant archaeological resources that either predate or contribute to the period of significance of the church building exist on the entire church property.

Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the surrounding landscape of the church and cemetery, and those potential remains should be considered in any future improvements to the wider church property. Important information also may be gained through archaeological analysis of cemetery features. Aspects of cemeteries documented as having information potential include the location and grouping of graves, both marked and unmarked; the use and quantity of commercial markers, fieldstone, or impermanent markers; patterns in funerary art over time; cemetery construction or engineering techniques as determined from documents or archaeological features; details of landscape architecture both visible above ground and existing as archaeological features; and inscriptions indicating identity, cultural affiliation, birth and death dates, and cause of death. In addition to having the potential to yield important information about the past, cemeteries and unmarked graves are protected by North Carolina General Statutes 65 and 70. To date, no archaeological investigation has been carried out at the church, and the cemetery may contain unmarked burials that do not appear in the documentary record. This should be considered in any future development, landscaping, restoration, or archaeological research activities on church property.

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**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** N/A

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

Property is:

- 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.

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Period of Significance**

1848

**Architect/Builder**

Caveny, John, Stonecutter/Engraver (North Carolina)

White, J., Stonecutter/Engraver (Charleston, South Carolina)

Harrill, L. H., Stonecutter/Engraver (Shelby, North Carolina)

Carolina Marble Works, Stonecutter/Engraver (Lincolnton, North Carolina)

**Significant Dates**

1848

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

**SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Built in 1848, Machpelah Presbyterian Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. The church embodies the distinctive characteristics of a rural, mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival-style church in Lincoln County. The property fulfills Criterion Consideration A as a religious property that derives its primary significance from its architectural importance.<sup>4</sup> Machpelah Presbyterian Church reflects the regional interpretation of the Greek Revival popular in Piedmont North Carolina church architecture of the mid- to late nineteenth century. Characteristic of rural churches of the period are its simple, rectangular, gable-front form and symmetrical façade with paired entry doors. Elements reflecting the Greek Revival style include the use of Flemish bond brickwork, a decorative brick cornice evoking a simplified classical entablature, and evenly spaced nine-over-nine wood-sash windows. The interior continues this restrained classical influence with fluted woodwork and plain cornerblocks on the window surrounds, all of which are modest Greek Revival details typical of vernacular religious architecture of the era. Together, these features exemplify an austere, rural interpretation of the Greek Revival style.

The church retains its historical setting and association with Machpelah Cemetery, which lies to the northeast. Surrounded by a low, dry-stacked stone wall, burials in the cemetery began in 1801 with the burial of Polly Graham. Machpelah Cemetery contains gravemarkers and monuments from the early to mid-nineteenth century that exhibit the artistic talents of known stonecutters. The cemetery strongly contributes to the church's setting, feeling and historical associations.

Machpelah Presbyterian Church has a period of significance of 1848, when the church was constructed.

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

**HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

<sup>4</sup> Criterion Consideration C does not apply since Machpelah Cemetery is secondary to Machpelah Presbyterian Church.

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**Architectural Context**

Machpelah Presbyterian Church embodies the distinctive characteristics of a rural Greek Revival-style church, constructed in 1848. Characteristic of the rural church type, the building features a simple, rectangular plan with a front-gabled roof, symmetrical elevations, and paired entry doors. The use of Flemish bond brickwork and a decorative brick cornice elevates the otherwise restrained design, reflecting the influence of the Greek Revival style. Hallmark Greek Revival features include the building's symmetrical proportions, evenly spaced nine-over-nine wood-sash windows, and the simplified classical detailing seen in the brick cornice, which evokes a modest entablature. Inside, the church continues this classical influence with fluted woodwork and plain cornerblocks on the window surrounds. Together, these elements demonstrate how Machpelah Presbyterian Church embodies both the rural, vernacular gabled church form and a restrained interpretation of the Greek Revival style.

Antebellum church-building campaigns in North Carolina were rooted in the revival movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Beginning around 1800, evangelization efforts by Baptists, Methodists, and New Light Presbyterians ushered the state into what became known as the Great Revival. This emotional, salvation-driven movement transcended class and race, drawing thousands of people—literate and illiterate, enslaved and free, rich and poor—into its fold.<sup>6</sup> Another wave of revivalist fervor took place between 1829 and 1835, followed by a third revival in 1857.<sup>7</sup> Built in 1848, Machpelah Presbyterian Church was erected between the second and third revivals, making it an outlier; however, the church more accurately stands as a self-tribute to the Davidson, Graham, and Brevard families, who dominated Lincoln County's iron industry. The wealth and social status of these families is reflected in the church's use of substantial materials, such as Flemish bond brickwork, and its adoption of current architectural trends, particularly the Greek Revival style, which was popular in North Carolina during this period. This combination of refined, stylistically conscious design and durable materials distinguishes Machpelah from other rural churches in the county.

Alongside the Great Revival and its subsequent movements, the Greek Revival style flourished in the United States between 1825 and 1860 and is often referred to as the "National Style" due to its widespread appeal for institutional and residential buildings.<sup>8</sup> Interest in Roman art, architecture, and design developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, both in Europe and the United States. This interest in Roman culture precipitated the rise in interest of Greek culture, due in part to archaeological investigations that "emphasized Greece as the Mother of Rome."<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the United States' support for Greece's War of Independence (1821–1832) and the lingering effects of the War of 1812 fostered a distaste for British stylistic influences, such as the Federal style.<sup>10</sup>

The Greek Revival style's associations with classical tradition and democracy further encouraged its spread. Publications such as *The Antiquities of Athens* by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett served as a primary source for the details and proportions of Greek architectural orders, as well as for the principles of classical "correctness" that were promoted as ideals in modern architecture.<sup>11</sup> Character-defining features of the Greek Revival style included gabled or hipped, low-pitched roofs; cornices with wide trim or entablatures; front porches or portico entries; Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian columns or pilasters; and elaborate door surrounds.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 196.

<sup>7</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 196.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 250.

<sup>9</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 251.

<sup>10</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 251.

<sup>11</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 196.

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In North Carolina, the Greek Revival style was prevalent in public buildings, such as courthouses, as well as in domestic architecture. One of the earliest and most influential examples of Greek Revival architecture in the state is the North Carolina State Capitol (National Register of Historic Places [NRHP] 1970). Constructed between 1833 and 1840, the building underwent at least three distinct phases of neoclassical influence, and five different architects contributed to its final design.<sup>12</sup> Its grand scale made a lasting impression on residents and visitors alike, embodying classical taste and serving as a symbol of American democracy in North Carolina.

Inspired by both local precedent and national trends, public architecture in the state increasingly utilized the Greek Revival style. The 1840s and 1850s witnessed a surge in courthouse construction across North Carolina, with the Greek Revival style utilized as a visual link to Greek democracy and the precedent set by the State Capitol. The Orange County Courthouse (NRHP 1981), Northampton County Courthouse (NRHP 2004), and Rowan County Courthouse (NRHP 1970) demonstrate the prominence of the style throughout the state.

Alongside courthouse construction, a wave of church building spread across North Carolina, as Protestant congregations erected fashionable new churches in response to the Great Revival and subsequent movements. These new buildings projected an image of refinement and respectability within Southern society.<sup>13</sup> While the Presbyterian denomination lagged behind Methodists and Baptists in size during the 1830s and 1840s, another revival in the 1850s led to significant growth of the Presbyterian church, prompting the replacement of older log or frame meeting houses with new, more substantial church buildings.<sup>14</sup>

In 1834, a Methodist circular encouraged congregations in the Piedmont to abandon their “former mode of building” and construct churches that were “neat and comfortable and in every way worthy of enlightened, honorable, and liberal people.”<sup>15</sup> The circular detailed simple aisled, gable-end churches, which became the standard for many Protestant churches, including Presbyterian ones. Depending on the size of the congregation, these new churches were either one or two stories tall, with or without a gallery, and typically featured one or two front doors leading into corresponding aisles dividing the pews.<sup>16</sup>

The gable-end, linear church plan lent itself well to more elaborate churches, many of which adopted a temple form in various interpretations of the Greek Revival style. The temple form conveyed an impression of permanence and status as churches assumed a more central role in their communities.<sup>17</sup> Builders’ guides, like those of Asher Benjamin and Minard Lafever, illustrated churches with porticoes, pediments, and pilasters.<sup>18</sup> Churches generally followed one of three primary arrangements: a projecting portico, a recessed portico, or a simple pedimented façade without a portico.<sup>19</sup> First Presbyterian Church (NRHP 1979) in Goldsboro, built in 1856, stands as a high-style example of an urban Greek Revival church with a temple form, constructed on the cusp of the third revival.

Rural churches built in response to the Great Revival and subsequent movements were often either plain, conservative buildings or vernacular interpretations of the style.<sup>20</sup> These churches were constructed either of wood frame or load-

<sup>12</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 218.

<sup>14</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 219.

<sup>16</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 219.

<sup>17</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 222.

<sup>18</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 222.

<sup>19</sup> Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, 222.

<sup>20</sup> Davyd Foard Hood, *Historically and Architecturally Significant Churches and Church-Related Cemeteries in Lincolnton, North Carolina*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, on file, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1994, E-25.

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bearing masonry, usually brick or stone. Well-built and stylish churches enabled congregations to project an image of sophistication and understanding of modern tastes. Piedmont Presbyterians erected brick churches as early as the 1820s, such as Buffalo Presbyterian Church (NRHP 2002) in Guilford County. In the 1850s, Presbyterians constructed several brick churches with a simplified temple form, including Hawfields (NRHP 1978) in Alamance County, Poplar Tent in Cabarrus County (6841 Poplar Tent Road, Concord), Centre (NRHP 1980) in Iredell County, and Back Creek (NRHP 1983) in Rowan County. Compared to Machpelah, these churches were built slightly later and exhibit a more monumental scale. In addition to being larger and taller than Machpelah, they typically feature a pedimented gable and a single central entry door flanked by windows. Both Poplar Tent and Back Creek also include brick pilasters as architectural detailing.

Carpenters building rural churches in North Carolina often designed their own versions of the Greek Revival style. Long Street Presbyterian Church (NRHP 1974) in Hoke County, built between 1845 and 1848, is an example of a local adaptation of the style, distinguished primarily by the hipped roof that forms its portico. Built in 1858, Old Bluff Presbyterian Church (NRHP 1974) in Cumberland County features a pedimented façade with a recessed, one-story portico.

Few examples of the Greek Revival style of architecture from the mid-nineteenth century survive in Lincoln County, and Machpelah Presbyterian Church is the only extant example of a Greek Revival-style church in the county. Of the few Greek Revival buildings in Lincoln County, two are houses in Lincolnton: the 1852 Wallace Alexander House, a contributing resource to the South Aspen Street Historic District (NRHP 2003) at 613 South Aspen Street and the circa-1841 Caldwell-Cobb-Love House (NRHP 1986) at 218 East Congress Street.

In addition to its significance as an example of the Greek Revival style, Machpelah Presbyterian Church is “the oldest surviving intact church building in Lincoln County,” according to Davyd Foard Hood.<sup>21</sup> Hood identifies the brick Third Creek Presbyterian Church (1835; NR 1983) and the frame St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church (1840; NR 1982), both located to the northeast in Rowan County, as comparable in their conservative and plain character.<sup>22</sup> Closer to Machpelah, Lincolnton Presbyterian Church, constructed in 1839 on West Water Street, was the town’s first brick church and likely similar in appearance to Machpelah.<sup>23</sup> The congregation outgrew the building in the 1890s, and it was subsequently demolished at an unknown date.

Although no longer extant, the third church building of Unity Presbyterian Church’s (8210 Unity Church Road, Denver), constructed in 1833, shared several common features with Machpelah, including its rectangular, front-gabled form; two entry doors on the façade; and an interior gallery. Notable differences included its frame construction and lack of architectural detailing with its flush eaves.<sup>24</sup> The 1833 church was demolished in the 1930s to accommodate the present church building.

Salem Union Church (NRHP 1995), located at 3410 Startown Road in rural, north-central Lincoln County, was also built in 1848 to replace an earlier log building constructed prior to 1814.<sup>25</sup> Similar in design to Machpelah, the 1848 structure was a gable-front brick church with two flat-arch entry doors on the façade. Over the years, Salem Union underwent significant alterations. In 1914, a tower was added, the interior refinished, and the original front doors

<sup>21</sup> Hood, *Historically and Architecturally Significant Churches and Church-Related Cemeteries in Lincoln County, North Carolina*, 1994, E-25.

<sup>22</sup> Hood, *Historically and Architecturally Significant Churches and Church-Related Cemeteries in Lincoln County, North Carolina*, 1994, E-26.

<sup>23</sup> Hood, *Historically and Architecturally Significant Churches and Church-Related Cemeteries in Lincoln County, North Carolina*, 1994, E-26.

<sup>24</sup> Marvin A. Brown and Maurice C. York, *Our Enduring Past: A Survey of 235 Years of Life and Architecture in Lincoln County, North Carolina* (Lincolnton, NC: Lincoln County Historic Properties Commission, 1986), 253; Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resources Survey and Evaluations for NC 16 (Lucia to NC 150), Gaston, Lincoln, and Catawba Counties, North Carolina Department of Transportation, TIP Number R-2206, State Project Number 8.1830501*, on file, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1992, 89.

<sup>25</sup> Brown and York, *Our Enduring Past*, 131.

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replaced with windows. Around the same time, it is likely the original flat-arch windows were replaced with the Gothic Revival-style pointed-arch windows.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Salem Union Church no longer reflects its early appearance.

Located in downtown Lincolnton, St. Luke's Episcopal Church (NRHP 1992) was initially constructed in 1842, with its tower rebuilt seven years later in 1849.<sup>27</sup> In 1886, the congregation laid a new cornerstone, and the church was largely rebuilt, with only a portion of the tower remaining intact. In 1917, the exterior was covered with stucco, which failed by 1923 and was replaced with a brick veneer.<sup>28</sup> In addition to its alterations, St. Luke's Episcopal Church is a Gothic Revival style church that has buttresses; a tall, narrow steeple, and pointed-arch windows, elements that contrast with Machpelah's restrained Greek Revival style.

Due to the loss of Unity Presbyterian Church and the significant alterations to Salem Union Church and St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Machpelah Presbyterian Church remains the most intact early rural church in Lincoln County, maintaining its modest Greek Revival detailing.

**Historical Background of Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery**

**Establishment of Lincoln County and Early Settlement**

Located in the southwest corner of North Carolina's Piedmont region, Lincoln County encompasses 305 square miles. The area is characterized by its rolling terrain, waterways, and natural resources that have historically encouraged and sustained the area's economy. In April 1779, Lincoln County, totaling over 1,800 acres, was formed from a portion of what was then Tryon County, which included portions of present-day Cleveland County in addition to most of Catawba and Gaston counties.<sup>29</sup> Lincoln County was named to honor Massachusetts General Benjamin Lincoln who served in the Revolutionary War and was appointed by General George Washington to receive the sword of surrender from General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.<sup>30</sup> Lincolnton, located roughly 10 miles west of Machpelah Presbyterian Church, was made the county seat in 1785. As the population of Lincoln County increased with settlement in the early nineteenth century, there were calls to divide the county. As a result, Cleveland County was formed from western Lincoln County in 1841, Catawba County was carved from the northern part of the Lincoln County in 1842, and, lastly, Gaston County was formed in 1846.<sup>31</sup> These county divisions left Lincoln County smaller in land area than some of the counties that had been carved from it.

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, people of Scots-Irish and German descent came to the area from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina in order to take advantage of its inexpensive and rich farmland. Early settlers traveled through the Appalachian Mountains using the Great Wagon Road, and established homesteads throughout Lincoln County. The Scots-Irish settled primarily in the eastern portion of modern-day Lincoln County near Beatties Ford, leaving the German population to settle the west. Early Scots-Irish and German settlers erected homes, churches, and schools to recreate the strong communal environment they had left behind.

<sup>26</sup> Brown and York, *Our Enduring Past*, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Brown and York, *Our Enduring Past*, 164.

<sup>28</sup> Brown and York, *Our Enduring Past*, 164.

<sup>29</sup> Tryon County included all of Mecklenburg County and west of the Catawba River.

<sup>30</sup> Jason Harpe, *'The Society of My Own Family': Lincoln County Iron Manufacturers and Their Families, Lincoln County, North Carolina*, on file, Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc., Wake Forest, North Carolina, 2021, 2-1; David Leroy Corbitt, *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943* (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History and North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1950), 137.

<sup>31</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resources Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 9.

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The Scots-Irish settled an area known as Iron Station in the 1780s, though it was not incorporated until 1909.<sup>32</sup> Originally known as Sharon, the community was renamed Iron Station for its numerous iron mines, furnaces, and forges that operated in the vicinity from the 1780s to the 1880s.<sup>33</sup> Peter Forney, born of a French Huguenot father and a Swiss mother, was one of its earliest settlers of European descent.

By the time the first federal census was taken in 1790, there were 1,405 heads of household living in Lincoln County, most of whom were self-sufficient yeoman farmers.<sup>34</sup> In addition, 820 enslaved people lived and labored in Lincoln County.<sup>35</sup> With the turn of the nineteenth century, a strong antebellum economy took form and residents witnessed “considerable prosperity and influence” due to transportation improvements, the abundance of natural resources, and the establishment of cultural institutions, including the emergence of churches and private academies.<sup>36</sup>

Early Industry

Machpelah Presbyterian Church’s history was founded on the economic success of its residents, namely the Davidsons, Grahams, and Brevards. Historically, eastern Lincoln County and Iron Station relied upon two main economic proponents: agriculture and iron. The area was largely farmland where subsistence farmers raised a variety of small grains and a little tobacco. Cotton emerged and facilitated a cash-crop economy.<sup>37</sup>

Iron production in Lincoln County began in the 1780s and grew to include four cold blast furnaces, including Vesuvius, Madison-Derr, and Rehoboth/Reinhardt and Stonewall, which were owned by Joseph Graham, Peter Forney, and J. M. Smith, respectively.<sup>38</sup> In 1788, the North Carolina General Assembly passed “An Act to Encourage the Building of Iron Works in this State,” which incentivized the operation of iron forges with a 10-year tax exemption alongside a grant of 3,000 acres of “vacant land, not fit for cultivation.”<sup>39</sup> This act triggered a “mini-industrial revolution” in Lincoln County as the forges brought economic prosperity to the area through the production of hollow wares, andirons, firebacks, farm implements, and munitions for the military.<sup>40</sup> These products were then shipped to various markets by wagon or on flatboats down the Catawba River.

By 1823, Lincoln County had 10 forges and 4 furnaces in operation with an output of 900 tons, and peak production was reached in 1830 with the manufacture of 1,800 tons of pig iron.<sup>41</sup> Production at a few Lincoln County iron furnaces and forges continued during and after the Civil War, but all fell out of the hands of the original local families.<sup>42</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed, Lincoln County iron manufacturers were unable to compete profitably with iron manufactures of the North, and by the 1880s, local iron works shut down.<sup>43</sup>

Iron Families in Lincoln County

<sup>32</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '3-1.

<sup>33</sup> William S. Powell, *The North Carolina Gazetteer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 264.

<sup>34</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resource Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resource Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resource Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 9; Brown and York, *Our Enduring Past*, 248.

<sup>37</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resource Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '4-1.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas A. Wait and Joshua McKaughan, “Iron and Steel Industry,” NCPedia, revised October 2022, <https://www.ncpedia.org/iron-and-steel-industry>.

<sup>40</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '4-1.

<sup>41</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '4-1; Lester J. Cappon, “Iron-Making – A Forgotten Industry of North Carolina,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 9, no. 4 (October 1932): 343–47.

<sup>42</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '4-5.

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Three generations of five Lincoln County families controlled nearly all the ironmaking in the Piedmont region. As a result, Lincoln County maintained a socially, politically, and economically affluent plantation society in the eastern section of Lincoln County for nearly 100 years.<sup>44</sup> These families, living in what was considered the backcountry of North Carolina, created an insular society through business partnerships, marriages, education, and churches.<sup>45</sup> These individuals, specifically the Davidson, Graham, and Brevard families, played a crucial role in the establishment of Machpelah Presbyterian Church.

Three families became linked through marriage and business partnerships in the late eighteenth century. Major John Davidson, a native of Pennsylvania and veteran of the Revolutionary War, settled in what became Mecklenburg County in 1759.<sup>46</sup> Major Davidson and his wife, Violet Winslow Wilson Davidson, had at least 10 children together. Their two eldest daughters, Rebecca and Isabella, married Captain Alexander Brevard and General Joseph Graham, respectively.

In the 1790s, Major Davidson and his sons-in-law, General Graham and Captain Brevard, purchased interest in a property owned by General Peter Forney.<sup>47</sup> The land was known as “Big Ore Bank,” and was the bed of iron ore in eastern Lincoln County that fed the iron industry. In 1792, General Graham settled his family at Vesuvius Furnace (NRHP 1974) in Lincoln County, approximately 2 miles north of Machpelah Presbyterian Church. Captain Brevard moved his family from their home in Iredell County to a home he built called Mount Tirzah (lost to arson in 1968), located roughly 2 miles south of Machpelah Church and Cemetery.

Beyond their business affiliation, the family stayed connected in other aspects of life. Together, the Brevards and Grahams established a family cemetery following the death of Polly Graham, the 13-year-old daughter of General Graham and Isabella Davidson Graham, in 1801.<sup>48</sup> Conveniently located roughly halfway between General Graham’s Vesuvius Furnace to the north and Captain Brevard’s Mount Tirzah to the south, the cemetery’s location made it a central meeting point for the prominent families to bury their loved ones. The cemetery lies close to the former plank road (now aptly named Old Plank Road) to the east, which led from Lincolnton to Beatties Ford and on to Charlotte. Often referred to as the “Brevard and Graham Graveyard,” the families called the cemetery Machpelah, a Biblical reference to the said burial place of Abraham and his kin. General Graham and Captain Brevard erected the dry-stacked stone wall around the cemetery, presumably built to keep out roaming animals since there were no livestock laws at the time.<sup>49</sup>

Establishment of Machpelah Presbyterian Church

Prior to the construction of Machpelah Presbyterian Church, the area’s Scots-Irish residents, including the Grahams, were members of Unity Presbyterian Church.<sup>50</sup> One of the earliest Presbyterian congregations in the area founded around 1796, Unity Presbyterian Church served the Beatties Ford community, located roughly 6 miles east of

<sup>44</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-1.

<sup>45</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-1

<sup>46</sup> Chalmers G. Davidson and Jared Dease, “Davidson, John,” NCPedia, Revised December 2022, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/davidson-john>.

<sup>47</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-18; Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 17: 274.

<sup>48</sup> Jason Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, application for Historic Landmark designation, on file, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 2016: 33; Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 6-28.

<sup>49</sup> Machpelah Church and Cemetery (LN0516) Survey File, on file, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Graham was a descendant of French Huguenots. Many French Huguenot descendants joined the ranks of the Presbyterians upon their arrival in the United States. Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 469.

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Machpelah Presbyterian Church in present-day Denver.<sup>51</sup> In addition, a church known as the Old Dutch Meetinghouse served the area. Today, only a small cemetery that lies approximately 0.5-miles south of Machpelah Presbyterian Church stands as a reminder of the church; however, some historians suggest that Machpelah Church sprang up from the no longer extant Old Dutch Meetinghouse.<sup>52</sup>

Though the precise origins of Machpelah Presbyterian Church remain unclear, it is likely the Graham and Brevard families wanted to have a place of worship closer to their respective homes and family burial place. In his 1829 last will and testament, Alexander Brevard set aside a sum of money to be used for the “payment of ministers of the Gospel for preaching Sermons at or near our family Grave yard which is between Mount Tirzah Forge & Vesuvius Furnace.”<sup>53</sup> The text in the will suggests that the family brought ministers to the site of Machpelah Cemetery to preach, despite the lack of a proper church building, which was common for small, rural communities in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

In 1837, 11 years prior to the construction of Machpelah Church, Moses W. and Violet Graham Alexander purchased the “surplus of outlands belonging to the estate of Joseph Graham” from John R. and Sophia Witherspoon, Joseph Graham, Robert Hall and Mary Morrison, and William A. Graham.<sup>54</sup> This deed included a 161-acre parcel with the “family graveyard” that stood “a little North East from where the Old Dutch church stood.”<sup>55</sup> Under the ownership of Moses W. and Violet Graham Alexander, Machpelah Presbyterian Church was built on its present-day site.

The first mention of erecting a church on the site of Machpelah Cemetery dates to a December 2, 1847 proposal request in the local *Lincoln Courier* put forth by a group of five commissioners, which included Charles C. Graham, Ephraim A. Brevard, William M. Johnston, Cyrus L. Hunter, and David Dellinger.<sup>56</sup> The proposed location as the “Brevard and Graham Family Grave Yard, nearly equi-distant between Graham’s Furnace and Brevard’s Forge.”<sup>57</sup> The proposal provided specific plans for the building, stating it was to be “a new brick church” measuring “44 feet long by 28 feet wide.”<sup>58</sup> However, the church that was ultimately constructed measured 40 feet long by 30 feet wide. The church was to rest on a stone foundation and have “3 doors and 10 windows,” though the church

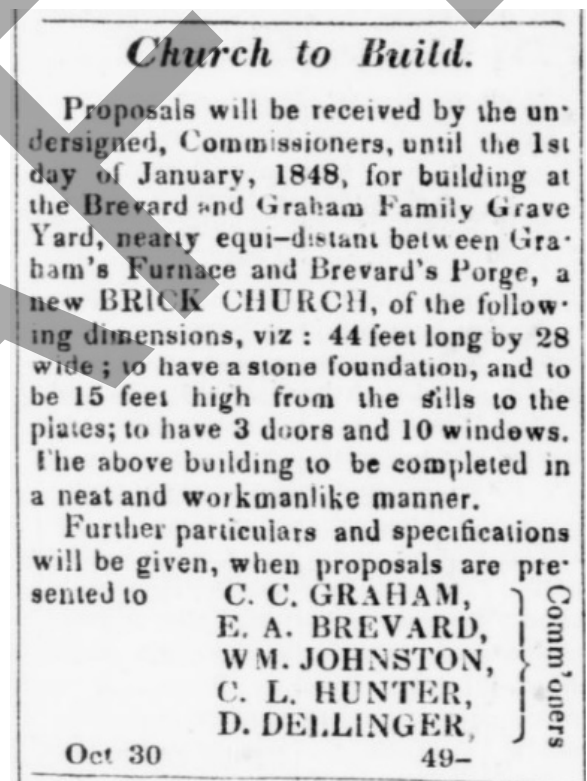


Figure 1: Proposal for the construction of Machpelah Presbyterian Church in the *Lincoln Courier* on December 2, 1847.

<sup>51</sup> William L. Sherrill, *Annals of Lincoln County, North Carolina; Containing Interesting and Authentic Facts of Lincoln County History Through the Years 1749 to 1937* (Charlotte, NC: Charlotte Observer Press, 1937), 48. Unity Presbyterian Church remains an active congregation though the church buildings have been subject to rebuilding and remodeling.

<sup>52</sup> Sherrill, *Annals of Lincoln County*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Probate Records, Alexander Brevard (1828), last will and testament, “North Carolina Probate Records, 1735–1970,” digital images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939L-J6S3-89?i=95&cc=1867501> : accessed 7 June 2024).

<sup>54</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 37: 217; Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 32. The Graham and Brevard families were further intertwined as children of General Graham and Captain Brevard married on another.

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 37: 217.

<sup>56</sup> “Church to Build,” *Lincoln Courier*, December 2, 1847.

<sup>57</sup> “Church to Build,” *Lincoln Courier*, December 2, 1847.

<sup>58</sup> “Church to Build,” *Lincoln Courier*, December 2, 1847.

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ended up with two doors and eight windows.<sup>59</sup> The commissioners added that the building should be completed in a “neat and workmanlike manner.”<sup>60</sup> The church was built for \$1,050, which was said to be partially funded by Captain Brevard through his aforementioned will.<sup>61</sup>

Shortly after its construction in 1848, the church was recognized by the Concord Presbytery and adopted the name Machpelah to coincide with the family cemetery. With the construction of the church, Machpelah Cemetery became a public cemetery utilized by the congregation. As a result of the building’s construction, Machpelah Presbyterian Church stood as a symbol of the area’s “cultural maturation” and served as a community hub for those living in the area.<sup>62</sup>

On May 19, 1849, Violet Graham Alexander sold the tract with the exception of “25 acres reserved exclusively for the use of the Church and Family Grave yard” to Ephraim and Robert Brevard.<sup>63</sup> Ten years later, Violet Graham Alexander sold the 25-acre church and cemetery land to C. L. Hunter, J. F. Johnston, Lewis Dellinger, and David Summerow who acted as Trustees of Machpelah Presbyterian Church.<sup>64</sup> The church and cemetery occupied only a small, southern portion of the larger parcel, and the remainder of the land was used as farmland with the profits going to support the church.<sup>65</sup>

Early Pastors and Congregants

Reverend Robert Hall Morrison, one of the founders and the first president of Davidson College, served as Machpelah’s first pastor, while also serving congregations at Unity and Castanea Presbyterian churches.<sup>66</sup> Morrison led the congregation from 1848 until his death in 1889, though there was a brief lull in services near the end of the Civil War in 1865.<sup>67</sup>

Machpelah Presbyterian Church’s congregation has historically been small as it served a handful of families in rural eastern Lincoln County. Many early members of the prominent white families, such as the Graham and the Brevards, relocated to Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee to capitalize on the cotton boom that occurred in these states during the 1830s and 1850s.<sup>68</sup> The wealthiest amongst this group maintained their North Carolina plantations as a primary residence and acted as absentee landowners for their out-of-state properties.<sup>69</sup> Between 1865 and 1892, membership rolls at Machpelah Presbyterian Church declined due to the death of congregants and the relocation of members to other area churches.<sup>70</sup> Upon Morrison’s death in 1889, Machpelah’s congregation brought in pastors from neighboring Presbyterian churches to preach intermittently until 1903.<sup>71</sup>

Machpelah in the Twentieth Century

<sup>59</sup> “Church to Build,” *Lincoln Courier*, December 2, 1847.

<sup>60</sup> “Church to Build,” *Lincoln Courier*, December 2, 1847.

<sup>61</sup> Sherrill, *Annals of Lincoln County*, 140.

<sup>62</sup> Mattson and Associates, *An Architectural Resource Survey and Evaluations for NC 16*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 49: 372; Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 49: 580; Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 32.

<sup>65</sup> Machpelah Church and Cemetery (LN0516) Survey File.

<sup>66</sup> Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-10.

<sup>69</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-10.

<sup>70</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-10.

<sup>71</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, 5-10.

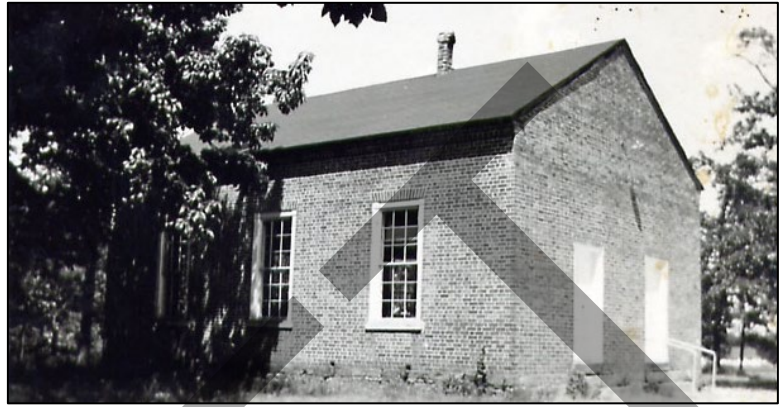
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Leading into the twentieth century, the area surrounding Machpelah Presbyterian Church remained a small settlement populated predominantly by farmers and small merchants. In 1903, regular services at Machpelah resumed under the direction of Reverend W. H. Wilson, and the congregation numbered 30.<sup>72</sup> Less than a year after he had arrived, Wilson passed away in 1904, once again leaving the Machpelah congregation without a pastor.<sup>73</sup> Numerous pastors served Machpelah Presbyterian Church in the twentieth century. They are the reverends W. H. Walsh, Charles H. Little, J. L. Ray, T. G. Tate, F. B. Rankin, C. L. Wilson, W. E. Furr, W. T. Smith, J. K. Parker, Jr., and W. H. Matherson.<sup>74</sup> In the 1930s, the congregation's membership peaked at 46.<sup>75</sup>



**Figure 2:** Machpelah Presbyterian Church in the 1930s (Courtesy of Jason Harpe).

Though Machpelah Presbyterian Church maintained a small congregation, the property was well cared for. The church's high material integrity is due in part to the congregation's small numbers. According to conversations with church members in the 1970s and 1980s, repairs were made to the building in 1936, including a new roof and the replacement of "cement" where mortar had fallen away.<sup>76</sup> In 1957, improvements were made to the exterior of the church by James O. and Jane Margaret Morrison Moore. This included a brick wall in front of the church, planting shrubbery and grass, and may have included painting of the exterior.<sup>77</sup>

The congregation continued to shrink after its peak in the 1930s as people moved out of the area in search of job opportunities outside agriculture. As early as 1968 there were discussions in the newspapers regarding the closure of Machpelah Presbyterian Church due to low membership. In 1976, the Presbyterian Church decided to dissolve the Machpelah congregation. This decision was reversed due to the historical significance of the church which remained active, though rarely used.<sup>78</sup>

In 2018, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina sold the property to Machpelah Church Foundation, a non-profit organization that continues to care for the church and grounds.<sup>79</sup> The building is used for occasional church services, including an Easter sunrise service.

<sup>72</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '5-10.

<sup>73</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '5-10.

<sup>74</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '5-10.

<sup>75</sup> Harpe, *The Society of My Own Family*, '5-10.

<sup>76</sup> Machpelah Church and Cemetery (LN0516) Survey File.

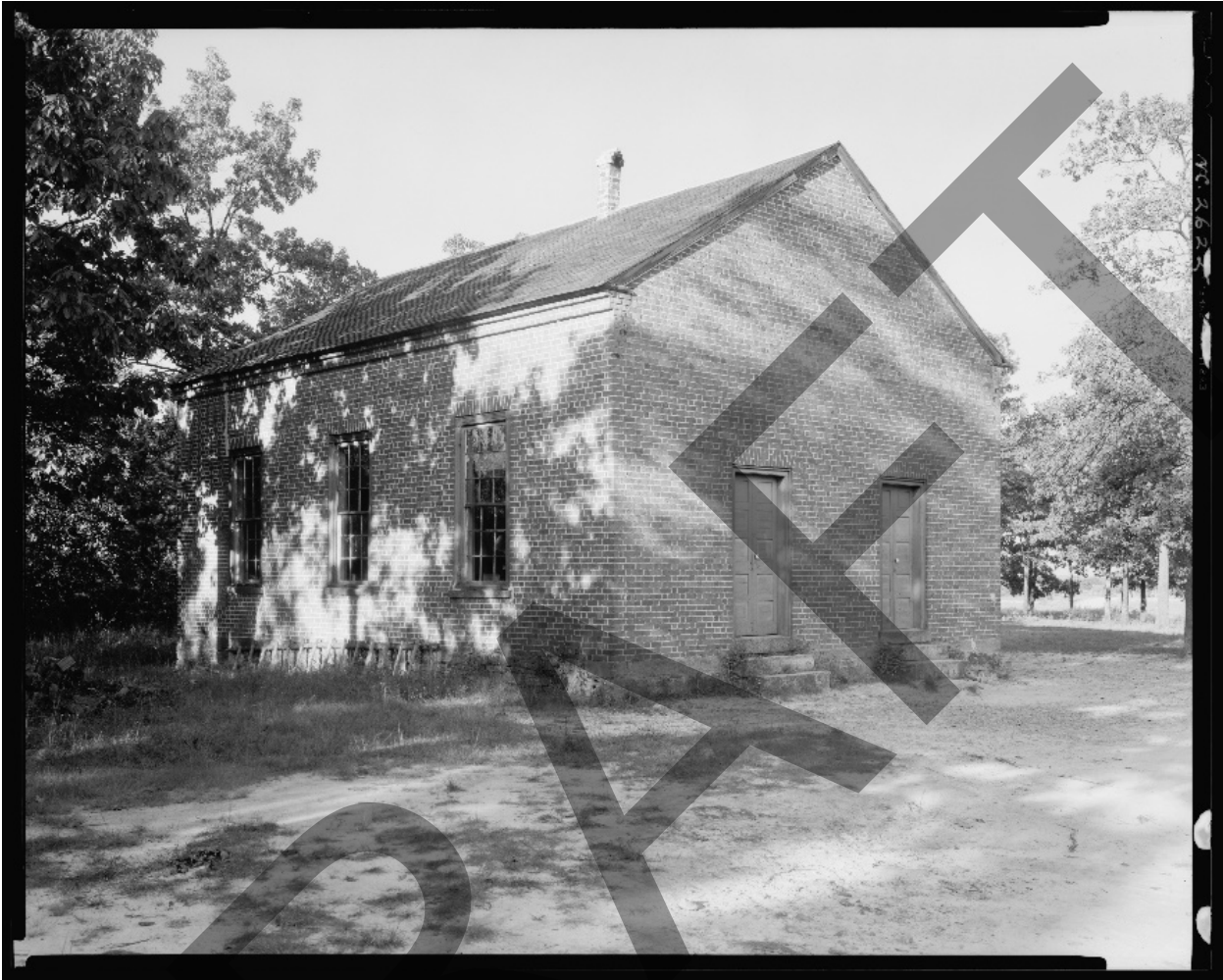
<sup>77</sup> Machpelah Church and Cemetery (LN0516) Survey File.

<sup>78</sup> Harpe, *Machpelah Presbyterian Church and Cemetery*, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Lincoln County, North Carolina, Deed Book 2770: 700.

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**Figure 3:** Photo of Machpelah Presbyterian Church taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston between 1935 and 1936 (Courtesy of Jason Harpe).

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<https://www.ncpedia.org/iron-and-steel-industry>.

**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 designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**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): LN0516

Machpelah Presbyterian Church  
Name of Property

Lincoln County, NC  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 24.5 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum, if other than WGS

**A** 35.467374                      -81.091292  
Latitude                              Longitude

**B** 35.467273                      -81.088621  
Latitude                              Longitude

**C** 35.463974                      -81.087644  
Latitude                              Longitude

**D** 35.463957                      -81.087729  
Latitude                              Longitude

**E** 35.465712                      -81.091789  
Latitude                              Longitude

**F** 35.466561                      -81.093239  
Latitude                              Longitude

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

The National Register boundary for Machpelah Presbyterian Church is illustrated by the heavy black line on an accompanying “**National Register of Historic Places Boundary and Coordinates Map**”, prepared by Olivia Heckendorf in July 2025 using the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office’s online mapping application, HPOWEB. The boundary encompasses 24.5 acres and includes the full extent of the legal tax parcel (PIN 3673714282), which is owned by the Machpelah Church Foundation. The boundary includes a portion of Brevard Place Road, which bisects the parcel. Along Old Plank Road to the east, the boundary extends to include a portion of the right-of-way, up to the edge where the grass meets the paved roadway. Within this boundary are Machpelah Presbyterian Church, Machpelah Cemetery, and the associated landscape features on the parcel.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

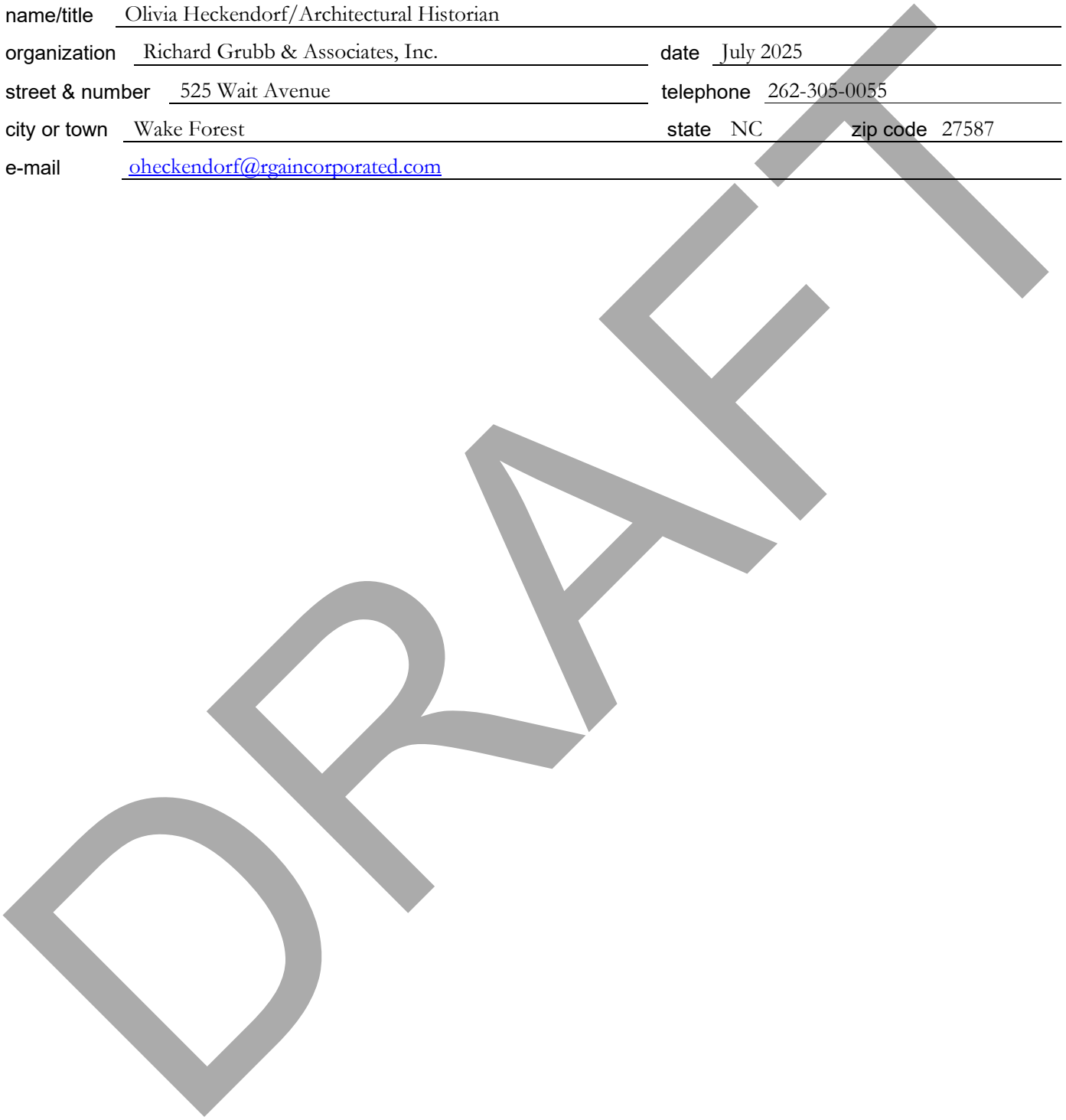
The National Register boundary encompasses Machpelah Presbyterian Church, Machpelah Cemetery, and associated landscape features that contribute to the property’s local significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The boundary largely aligns with the full extent of the historic tax parcel associated with the property, historically recorded as 25 acres. However, current GIS data indicates the parcel measures approximately 22.63 acres. This discrepancy may be due to the presence of Brevard Place Road, which bisects the parcel, and a portion of the right-of-way along Old Plank Road, which may not be included in the current legal parcel but historically contributed to the property’s acreage and setting. To account for this, the National Register boundary extends slightly beyond the current parcel to include the full width of Brevard Place Road where it divides the property, forming a contiguous boundary. On the eastern edge, the boundary also includes a portion of the Old Plank Road right-of-way, extending to where the grass meets the paved roadway. This inclusion acknowledges the property’s prominent corner location at a longstanding rural crossroads.

Machpelah Presbyterian Church  
Name of Property

Lincoln County, NC  
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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Olivia Heckendorf/Architectural Historian  
organization Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. date July 2025  
street & number 525 Wait Avenue telephone 262-305-0055  
city or town Wake Forest state NC zip code 27587  
e-mail [heckendorf@rgaincorporated.com](mailto:heckendorf@rgaincorporated.com)



Machpelah Presbyterian Church

Name of Property

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** Machpelah Presbyterian Church  
**City or Vicinity:** Iron Station, vicinity  
**County:** Lincoln  
**State:** North Carolina  
**Photographer:** Olivia Heckendorf, Richard Grubb & Associates (RGA)  
**Date Photographed:** May 2024

- Photo 1 of 15:** View northeast of primary (south) elevation of Machpelah Presbyterian Church with Machpelah Cemetery in the background.
- Photo 2 of 15:** View west of the east elevation of Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 3 of 15:** View southeast of the rear (north) and west elevations of Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 4 of 15:** View from the east entry door looking north towards the altar inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 5 of 15:** View from the altar looking to the south inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 6 of 15:** View looking west of the gallery inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 7 of 15:** View looking southeast toward the staircase in the gallery inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 8 of 15:** Detail view of the interior door inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 9 of 15:** Detail view of the altar inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 10 of 15:** Detail view of the pews inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 11 of 15:** Detail view of the staircase that leads to the gallery inside Machpelah Presbyterian Church.
- Photo 12 of 15:** View northeast of Machpelah Cemetery.

Machpelah Presbyterian Church

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**Photo 13 of 15:** Detail view of the stone wall and steps inside Machpelah Cemetery.

**Photo 14 of 15:** View west of variety of gravemarkers in Machpelah Cemetery.

**Photo 15 of 15:** View of the monument dedicated to Alexander Brevard.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

