NPS Form 10-900
(7-81)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Bethesda Presbyterian Church

and/or common Bethesda Presbyterian Church

2. Location

street & number 502 Dekalb Street ___ not for publication

city, town Camden ___ vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state South Carolina code 045 county Kershaw code 055

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	X private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	X religious
___ object	___ in process	X yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Bethesda Presbyterian Church (Dr. Charles J. Hammet)

street & number 502 Dekalb Street

city, town Camden ___ vicinity of state South Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kershaw County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Camden state South Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey (included within the City of Camden National Register Historic District) has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date X federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington, D.C. state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
_X_ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_X_ original site
___ good	___ ruins	_X_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Bethesda Presbyterian Church, located in Camden, South Carolina, was designed by Robert Mills and constructed in 1822. In his **Statistics of South Carolina** (1826), Mills described Bethesda:

> A handsome church has been erected in the upper part of the town, with a portico of four Doric columns in front, and a neat spire in the rear, containing a bell. The interior is arranged so that the floor and pews rise as they recede from the pulpit, giving every advantage to the audience, both in seeing and hearing.[1]

Exterior

Bethesda's south facade, facing Dekalb Street, has a tetrastyle Doric portico and entablature. A large semicircular arched stucco niche with panel below is flanked by arched double doors with "Gothic" transom sash.[2] Above each shuttered door is a stucco panel. Brick steps front the facade.

The north facade, while referred to by Mills as the rear of the building, is the current entrance to the church. It has a tristyle Tuscan portico with double scissor stairs that lead to the two gallery entrances. Two doors also open onto the church's main level. An oculus with "gothic sash" and a window with a flat brick arch are centered on the facade. A brick porch has replaced an earlier wooden one. The steeple is located above the church's north gable, directly above the interior balcony. A shingled spire sits atop a square base with louvered oculus on each side and an octagonal louvered belfry. Decorative elements on the steeple include reeded pilasters, panels, and an acorn cap.

On either side of the building (east and west facades) are five semicircular arched windows with "gothic sash." A stucco panel is located above each shuttered window. A narrow, non-original brick chimney flue breaks the west facade.

The brickwork, of which the church is constructed, is in Flemish bond on the south (front) facade and in American bond on the others.

Access to the basement is through a small doorway on the west facade. Ventilation openings are at ground level.

Interior

The interior of the church consists of the sanctuary and a balcony on the north elevation. The balcony is supported by two unfluted columns; its decorative features include recessed panels, fluted pilasters, and denticulation.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	
X 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates 1822 **Builder/Architect** Robert Mills

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Bethesda Presbyterian Church possesses national significance as an example of the work of Robert Mills. One of only a few Mills churches remaining in the United States, Bethesda is distinctive both for the quality and type of its design and for the stage it represents in Mills' career.

Background

The history of Presbyterianism in Camden, South Carolina, dates prior to the American Revolution. The town's first Presbyterian church or meeting house was destroyed during the war, but a new building replaced it by 1790. No record remains of the history of that building; however, a third church was constructed in 1806. The congregation grew, and the church so prospered that it was decided a new building, in a more central location, was needed. Robert Mills was selected as architect, and it is believed that David Bartling, who came from Philadelphia, was the master-builder. The current site was selected, and Bethesda Presbyterian Church was formally dedicated in 1822.

Robert Mills (1781-1855) was a native South Carolina architect who trained under James Hoban, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Latrobe. Perhaps best known for his design of the Washington Monument, Mills was also "Architect of Public Buildings" for the nation's capital. Largely as a result of his influence, the classical style became associated with the nation's early government buildings. During his career Mills designed buildings throughout South Carolina and in a variety of places including Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond. His works included churches, courthouses, and other government buildings, monuments, and private houses. Bethesda Church is one of the few Mills churches still in existence.

Architecturally Bethesda is representative of a distinctive phase in Mills' career. No longer a journeyman, but not yet the preeminent Federal architect designing the nation's early monumental buildings, Mills displayed in Bethesda the work of a maturing architect strongly influenced by Jeffersonian classicism. Bethesda, with its neo-classical temple form, represents "an important stage in Mills' creation of a distinctly American classical style."[1]

Prior to construction of Bethesda, Mills designed, in Philadelphia and Richmond, several auditorium-type churches. Bethesda, for some reason, was a departure from this. Whether the design was the preference of his clients in Camden, one is unsure. Bethesda does, however, display features that reflect Mills' practicality and his awareness of the American religious trend toward an emphasis on the pulpit (preaching) rather than on the altar. The coved

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bethesda Presbyterian Church, Camden, South Carolina: Sesqui-Centennial, 1805-1955.
n.p.: Bethesda Presbyterian Church, 1955.
(See Attachment)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Camden South

Quadrangle scale

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	17	536340	3789320
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Ann Eaddy, Historian

organization National Park Service date June 29, 1984

street & number 75 Spring Street, S.W. telephone (404) 221-2638

city or town Atlanta state Georgia

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state ___ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

Along the church's south wall is the raised pulpit centered in the arched recessed niche and flanked by the two arched doors.

The church floor slopes upward, away from the pulpit area and toward the north wall. The pews are arranged with sixteen boxes each on the east and west walls. Twelve rows of pews in the church's center are flanked by the two side aisles.

The arched windows, five each on the east and west walls, are recessed with no trim. The coved ceiling is framed by simple, light moldings. Its flat center panel has a decorative center medallion with acanthus leaves and rosettes in a delicate pattern.

Alterations

When comparing an 1827 engraving, drawn by Mills, of the church's south facade with the building's current appearance, it is obvious that little change has occurred. (The engraving indicates pilasters, stuccoed arches, and columns with no base. There is no physical evidence on the church that these features ever existed.) The church has, however, experienced repairs and some alterations, although records are not specific as to what this has actually involved. One unanswered question concerns the north portico. Scholars wonder whether it was part of Mills' original design or an early addition.

The earliest known mention of church repairs was in August 1849 when services were suspended for two Sundays in order to make repairs to the building.[3] With the Civil War and years of Reconstruction, it is unlikely that any major repair work would have taken place.

In 1886 an earthquake affected the Camden area, and the church's brick walls cracked. Subsequently, earthquake bolts were installed. This may have precipitated renovations to the church that occurred in 1890. At that time the original pulpit and pews were replaced, and new flooring placed above the original. Records are unclear, but at some time curtain walls were added between the columns of the north portico and between the columns and wall. Apparently the north facade's configuration of landings was designed to represent the Biblical "Five porches of Bethesda." Although specific information is not given, references indicate the 1890 renovation altered this original design.

In 1937 it was decided to restore the church. Under the direction of the architectural firm of Simons and Lapham from Charleston, most of the work was undertaken on the church's north elevation and its interior. On the north facade the non-original curtain walls were removed; the stairway to the balcony rebuilt utilizing the two existing stair landings; new doors installed, and the brick porch constructed. On the interior a new pulpit and box pews were installed. (An 1822 floor plan of the church reinforces the pew/pulpit arrangement.) The 1890 flooring was removed, and original flooring found below.

Restoration work in 1982-1983 involved repair of the steeple and replacement of the south porch floor based on the discovery of the original pavers.

Dekalb Monument

In the churchyard is the monument to Baron Dekalb. Designed by Robert Mills, the cornerstone was laid in 1825 and the monument was completed in 1827. The monument was described in Mills' **Statistics:**

> The monument erected here is simply elegant in its design. It presents the obelisk form, raised on a pedestal, all of white marble, and resting on a granite base composed of several expanding blocks, in the character of steps, and surrounded by an iron balustrade.[4]

The face of the obelisk is carved with a star near the top and a wreath near the lower center enclosing the words "To Dekalb." The block beneath the obelisk has inscriptions cut into the stone. The current iron balustrade is a reconstruction of the original.

Surroundings:

While church property includes several twentieth century buildings, the nominated acreage includes only the church and monument. Dekalb Street, a downtown thoroughfare, fronts the church property.

ceiling, sloping floor, and pulpit placement allow for the congregation both to better see and hear its preacher. The simplicity of the church's interior with its ceiling medallion as the primary decorative feature and the austere wall and ceiling surfaces as well as the shallow recessed niche behind the pulpit are characteristic of Mills' buildings in Baltimore and Richmond in the 1810s and 20s. Much of his work in these cities is now gone.[2]

The Dekalb Monument, located in the churchyard, reflects Mills' concept of classical style and represents one of his smaller memorial designs. The monument was constructed in memory of Baron Dekalb, a German who became a major general in the Revolutionary army and who died at the Battle of Camden. LaFayette laid the cornerstone to the monument in 1825. Mills briefly described the occasion in his **Statistics:**

> In front of the portico of this church (Bethesda), the interesting ceremony of reinterring the remains of baron Dekalb, and laying the corner-stone of the monument to be erected to the memory of this patriot and martyr to the cause of liberty, took place, in the presence of the nation's guest, the illustrious LaFayette, on the 9th day of March, 1825; attended by a large concourse of citizens. The scene was peculiarly striking, and interested every one present.[3]

Bethesda Presbyterian Church has served its congregation for over 162 years. Both the church and monument stand as evidence of Mills' emphasis on aesthetically pleasing design and on quality construction.

Footnotes

Section 7 - Description:

[1]Robert Mills, Statistics of South Carolina (Charleston, S.C.: Hurlbut & Lloyd, 1826), pp. 591-592.

[2]The Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia: 1786 Rule Book (reprint ed., Princeton: Pyne Press, (1971)), pp. VIII, XII.

[3]Interview with Risher Fairey, Director, Camden Archives, Camden, South Carolina, 31 May 1984. Mr. Fairey researched the Sessions Book of the Bethesda Presbyterian Church and discovered a reference to the repairs in the entry for August 11, 1849.

[4]Mills, Statistics, p. 592.

Section 8 - Significance:

[1]R.W. Liscombe, Department of Fine Arts, The University of British Columbia, to Henry Boykin, 7 February 1984.

[2]Robert L. Alexander, Professor, Art History, University of Iowa, to Henry Boykin, 13 February 1984.

[3]Mills, Statistics, p. 592.

The Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia: 1786 Rule Book. reprint ed., Princeton: Pyne Press, 1971.

Gallagher, H.M. Pierce., **Robert Mills: Architect of the Washington Monument, 1781-1855.** New York: Columbia University Press, 1935 reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1966.

Kirkland, Thomas J., and Kennedy, Robert M. **Historic Camden: Part Two, Nineteenth Century.** Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1926.

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Montgomery, Rachel. **Camden Heritage: Yesterday and Today.** Columbia, S.C.: R.L. Bryan, 1971.

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Poesch, Jessie. **The Art of the Old South.** N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.

Sellers, Hazel Crowson. **Old South Carolina Churches.** Columbia, S.C.: Crowson Printing Co., 1941.

Sessions Book of the Bethesda Presbyterian Church, I & II, 1806-1834, 1833-1887.

Whiffen, Marcus and Koeper, Frederick. **American Architecture, 1607-1976.** Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981.

Robert L. Alexander, Professor, Art History, University of Iowa, to Henry Boykin. 13 February 1984.

David Bartling, Master-Builder, to his daughter, Emeline Bartling. 14 October 1821.

R.W. Liscombe, Department of Fine Arts, The University of British Columbia, to Henry Boykin. 7 February 1984.

Boykin, Henry. Architectural Consultant, Bethesda Presbyterian Church, Camden, South Carolina. Interview, 31 May 1984.

Fairey, Risher, Director, Camden Archives, Camden, South Carolina. Interview, 31 May 1984.

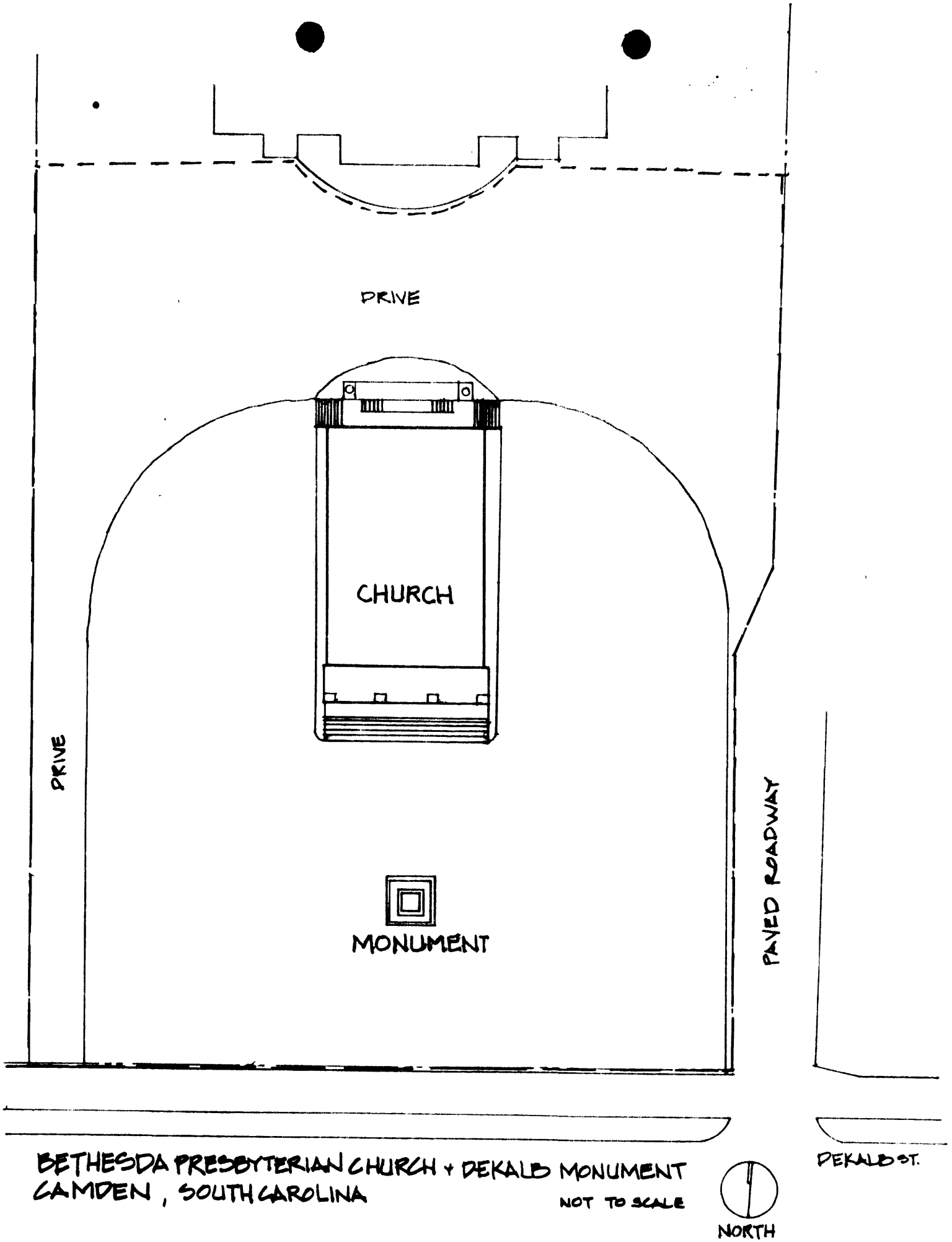
Kershaw County Deed Book K, 21 January 1822, p. 123.

Charleston, S.C., South Carolina Historical Society. Albert Simons Papers.

Madison, Wisconsin. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Chesnut Family Papers.

Verbal Boundary Description:

The National Historic Landmark designation for Bethesda Presbyterian Church pertains only to the church and the Dekalb Monument. Boundaries for the designation are: on the south, the church property line fronting the sidewalk and Dekalb Street; on the west, the church property line abutting the gravel drive; on the east, the edge of the paved roadway bordering the fence surrounding the churchyard; and on the north, the northern edge of the gravel driveway which separates the church building from the Sunday School building.



BETHESDA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH + DEKALB MONUMENT
CAMDEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

NOT TO SCALE