

CHRIST CHURCH  
2304 Highway 17 North  
Mount Pleasant  
Charleston County  
South Carolina

HABS SC-877  
*HABS SC-877*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### CHRIST CHURCH

HABS No. SC-877

**Location:** 2304 Highway 17 North, Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, South Carolina.

The coordinates for Christ Church are 79.812890 W and 32.843180 N, and they were obtained through Google Earth in June 2011 with, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

**Significance:** Christ Church Parish near Mount Pleasant, South Carolina was established by the Church Act of 1706. The modest brick masonry church was damaged and restored many times over the years.

**Description:** Christ Church is a single-story, one room brick masonry building with a small addition on the south side that serves as the secondary entry and sacristy. The sanctuary measures three bays across the front (west side) by five bays deep and has a steeply pitched hipped roof. The church has a standing seam metal roof and scored stucco façades imitating 2' x 3' stones. The west front façade has two steps leading to a raised panel double door, with a window centered to either side. Each single-hung window is glazed with six over six lights. The north façade contains five windows, with the larger center window containing eight over eight lights and the other windows containing six over six lights. At the top of all of the windows and the main door is a recessed fanlight. All of the windows have double wide raised panel shutters. The east side of the building contains an apse with a pediment and centrally located stained glass window. The south side of the building contains two windows near the west end of the building and the sacristy towards the east end. The windows along the north and south sides of the building are glazed with six over six lights and are also single-hung. The windows on the addition are glazed with six over six lights, but do not have fanlights or shutters. Concrete stairs lead to the door on the sacristy. Centrally located on the roof of the building is a 14' high, octagonal cupola.

The floor plan of Christ Church is a single longitudinal aisle plan, with nine rows of pews on either side. The interior walls are plastered and have wainscot 3' high that runs on all four walls. Wall sconces are positioned between the windows on the north and south walls. Located in the apse on the east wall is the altar, reredos and communion rail. The pulpit is situated in the southeast corner, adjacent to the sacristy door on the south wall. The barrel vaulted ceiling is covered with beaded pine board.

**History:** Leaving Charleston and heading north on Highway 17, past the busy shopping plazas and numerous hotels, nestled in a landscape of mature trees and surrounded by a peaceful cemetery is Christ Church. This picturesque colonial church and companion vestry house stand as a reminder of an earlier era. Christ Church

Parish near Mount Pleasant, South Carolina was established by the Church Act of 1706.<sup>1</sup> In 1707, the foundations were laid for a wood building to serve the newly created parish. It was to act as the center for administration of local government.<sup>2</sup> The church was used as an information center where public notices and government advertisements were posted. Church registers were also responsible for tracking births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials. The parish church also served as an election precinct for coastal and Low Country representation in the colonial and state legislatures until 1865. The borders for the parish extended from Mount Pleasant north to Owendaw Creek and from the coast west to the Wando River area. In the years to follow, the church would undergo a series of improvements, be destroyed and rebuilt, and ultimately be restored back to an appropriate time period.

Initial improvements to the church during its early years include: window repairs, the addition of a pulpit, railings for the communion table and fencing for the church yard.<sup>3</sup> By 1724 the parish had grown significantly and was in need of a new building. The Assembly voted to give 600 British pounds for the construction of a larger sanctuary. This same year a fire destroyed the original wood sanctuary of Christ Church.<sup>4</sup> The foundation for a new brick structure was laid in 1726 and work commenced on construction of the larger sanctuary. The new sanctuary took a year to construct and was completed and dedicated in 1727.<sup>5</sup> Work on Christ Church continued during the following decades, including the addition of a chancel on the east wall in the 1730s. This second generation brick church had doors centered on the north and south walls, creating a transecting aisles plan. These doorways were later converted to windows around 1741, when records indicate that the Vestry voted to make the alterations to increase seating capacity.<sup>6</sup> However, the changes may have occurred several years after the Vestry vote.<sup>7</sup> With the conversion of the north and south doorways, the center window of the smaller west wall was altered to serve as the main entry door, re-orienting the interior along a single longitudinal aisle plan. Christ Church was significantly damaged in 1782, when retreating British soldiers set fire to it and the Vestry house.<sup>8</sup> The brick walls were the only surviving elements from this blaze, requiring construction of a new roof and interior, along with the replacement of all furnishings. This restoration was begun in 1787.<sup>9</sup> During these renovations also came the addition of the first cupola to adorn Christ Church.<sup>10</sup>

In 1810, the 1787 cupola was removed from the roof due to its deteriorated condition. In the spring of 1835, a new cupola was erected and quoins were added to the exterior of the church, along with a fresh coat of stucco. The height of the cupola was raised in 1843.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of the Civil War a company of Union Cavalry used the church as a stable.<sup>12</sup> The doors, windows, pews and pulpit were used for firewood. The reredos was used for walls of a pigsty. All that was left intact were four walls and the roof. By 1874, a new wooden floor and new doors and windows were installed. These doors and windows are still

present.<sup>13</sup> At this period in time there were three windows in the south wall and four in the north. A semi-circular recessed fanlight was installed over each window and the door. At the completion of this work, the church was consecrated by Bishop William Bell White Howe.<sup>14</sup> In 1885 and 1886 Christ Church was damaged as the result of a hurricane and earthquake. After these disasters, repairs and improvements continued to occur throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1915, the barrel vaulted ceiling was exposed with removal of the plaster ceiling damaged by prolonged moisture exposure.<sup>15</sup> The vaulted ceiling was covered with beaded pine board and the beams, which extend the width of the church, were replaced.<sup>16</sup> The stained glass window in the chancel was obtained as a gift in 1917. In 1923, the 1835 plaster and quoins were removed and the church re-stuccoed with cement plaster. The interior walls were also re-plastered at this time.<sup>17</sup> The next set of improvements was made to the roof, eaves and cupola; funds for the improvements came from the federal reparations in 1915 and a gift of \$5,000 in 1924. In 1959, Miss Catherine P. Langley donated \$4,000 for the addition of wings to each side of the chancel as a sacristy and a rector's office. The project was finished in 1961 and included the conversion of the eastern most window on the south wall to an interior door for access to the addition.<sup>18</sup> The fanlight remained in situ. The corresponding window in the north wall was retained, but was closed off by the presence of the northern wing.

In 2000-2001 Richard Marks Restorations, Inc. undertook an extensive restoration and repair plan to address some of the issues that confronted the church building. This work included the removal of the inappropriate 1961 concrete block addition to the north and east walls of the building, stabilization and repair to the present cupola and updates to the electrical and flooring systems.<sup>19</sup> In 2003 the same contractor returned the interior furnishings to an early to mid-nineteenth century interpretive period and addressed the high humidity levels in the church which was causing damage to the interior finishes. To help mitigate the moisture and mildew problems, two additional return air grills were added in the central wooden ceiling panel.<sup>20</sup>

The history of Christ Church reveals over three hundred years of growth and setbacks. Regardless of the magnitude of the disaster the building experienced, its parishioners remain dedicated, performing the necessary reconstructions and improvements in keeping with its colonial period architecture. Even as the church expanded into a nearby modern facility, members attend weekly traditional services in the historic sanctuary providing continuity with the past.

**Sources:** Caughman, Wright. *Christ Church, National Register Nomination Form* (1972).

Christ Church Mount Pleasant, *Our History*, <http://www.christch.org/#/about-us/our-history>.

Gregorie, Anne King. *Christ Church 1706-1959: A Plantation Parish of the South Carolina Establishment* (Charleston: The Dalcho Historical Society, 1961).

Leake, Larry S. Richard Marks Restoration Inc., *Christ Episcopal Church Report* (2004).

**Historians:** Lora Cunningham and Ryan Pierce.

### **Project**

**Information:** This documentation project was conducted by students in the Clemson University/ College of Charleston Master's of Science in Historic Preservation program. The team leaders were Lora Cunningham and Ryan Pierce. Faculty advisors were Ashley R. Wilson and James L. Ward. Team members included: Caglar Ayden, Katherine Ferguson, Kelly Finnigan, Lauren Golden, Marie Haremski, Elyse Harvey, Brittany Lavelle, Rebecca Long, Stefanie Marasco, Joseph Reynolds, Mariah Schwartz, Sun Tianying, Syra Valiente, David Weirick, and Jamie Wiedman.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne King Gregorie, *Christ Church, 1706-1959: A Plantation Parish of the South Carolina Establishment* (Charleston: The Dalcho Historical Society, 1961) 7.

<sup>2</sup> Wright Caughman, 1972, National Register Nomination Form, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gregorie, 8, 15, 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. Caughman, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Gregorie, 39.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Caughman, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Gregorie, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Caughman, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Caughman, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Gregorie, II 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Caughman, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Gregorie, 133.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. Caughman, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Larry S. Leake, Richard Marks Restoration, Inc., *Christ Episcopal Church Report*, (2004) I.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 6-7.