

VLR-12/8/87 NRHP 7/7/88

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Old Providence (Halifax) Presbyterian Church (DHL File No. 41-113)

and/or common name Same

2. Location

street & number VA Route 2 (State Route 624) N/A not for publication

city, town Providence N/A vicinity of Fifth Congressional District (Rep. Daniel Daniels)

state Virginia code VA county Halifax code 083

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: VACANT

4. Owner of Property

name Blanks Memorial Trust

street & number Route 2, Box 355

city, town Nathalie N/A vicinity of state Virginia 24577

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Halifax County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Halifax state Virginia 24558

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title DHL File No. 41-113 has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date January, 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Division of Historic Landmarks, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia 23219

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u> N/A </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The original Providence Presbyterian Church, First named Halifax Church, is sited on the northeast quadrant of the intersection of State Routes 623 and 624 in the village of Providence, Halifax County. When it was replaced by the larger edifice to its north in 1926, the Providence Church building had served the Presbyterian population in the northeastern portion of the county for almost 100 years. Devoid of all but the simplest of ornament, the rectangular, one-story, single-room, gable-roofed frame structure bespeaks the simplicity of the Presbyterian concept of religion and worship.

The church edifice, an contributing building, and the surrounding 0.36-acre parcel of land on which it is sited comprise this nomination.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The form and appearance of the Providence Presbyterian Church have survived virtually unaltered from the time of its construction in the early 1830s. It is a rectangular frame structure approximately 26 feet by 31 feet in size. Its one-room plan with steeply pitched gable roof and gable-end entrance was used time and again for public buildings as settlement progressed across the state. While the size and degree of ornamentation of these governmental and institutional buildings varied with the size and wealth of their constituencies, these vernacular structures comprise a generic building type that is an important record of communal development in Virginia. The building erected by the Providence congregation is generic to the point of not even possessing a steeple or bell tower to denote its religious purpose.

Exterior

The mortise and tenon timber frame structure rests upon a reconstructed foundation of cinderblock faced with the remaining brick from the original foundation. This reconstruction was carried out during the 1982 restoration, after the original sub-structure had deteriorated beyond the point of salvage. There are two air vents on each longitudinal wall of the building. These are covered with 19th-century cast-iron grills.

All four sides of the church are covered with narrow clapboard. The corner boards are unornamented, and extend down the corners of the longitudinal walls, the edges of these boards being exposed on the end walls.

The single entrance into the former church is on the east-facing gable end wall, and is the only opening on this side of the structure. The double doorway is centered in the wall, and has an unadorned surround without sidelights or transom. The wooden doors, each of which have two flush panels, are reproductions. The brick steps were constructed along with the foundation using bricks from the original foundation. Several large stones originally served as church steps according to accounts of older members of the congregation. Also on the entrance wall is a projecting eave not found

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				
Specific dates	ca. 1830-35	Builder/Architect	Unknown	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Providence (Halifax) Church is significant as the home of the first Presbyterian congregation organized in Halifax County in 1830, and therefore as the first Presbyterian church edifice in the county. It was constructed ca. 1830-35. The one-story, one-room building represents a vernacular tradition that is typical of many "first" public buildings constructed in Virginia. This same structural format was used time and again for churches, schoolhouses, courthouses, and, later in the mid-west, for town halls and grange halls. As such, it represents a generic building type that reflects the development of government and institutions during the early years of the republic as people established and adapted to a new social order. This building is also a testament to the devotion and religious simplicity of its founding members and of their desire to establish their own church at the expense of leaving a larger and more prestigious church home in Charlotte County.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The organization of a Presbyterian congregation and the subsequent construction of a church edifice did not occur until relatively late in the early history of Halifax County. By several accounts of the church, Presbyterianism had been established in Virginia by 1619. By 1700 there were at least five ministerial assignments in the colony. After 1700, the Presbyterian Scotts began migrating south along the Shenandoah Valley from Pennsylvania, eventually crossing east over the Blue Ridge where they joined with the English Presbyterians who were moving westward from the Tidewater region.

In 1737 the Cub Creek Presbyterian Church was organized in Charlotte County. This congregation became an exceptionally strong and active body locally and within the state. By the early decades of the 1800s it enjoyed a sound reputation outside the borders of Virginia for its commitment to Christian education. It also had the ability to consistently attract compelling ministers to its pulpit. As a result, the Cub Creek Church had communicants from throughout the Southside, eventually establishing branch ministries that remained members of this "mother church." By 1800 its membership was between 400 and 500 persons. However, after 1825 officially recognized congregations began to form from the Cub Creek congregation as independent bodies. It would appear that it was the popularity and strength of Cub Creek that delayed the formation of a Presbyterian congregation in Halifax County until 1830 when the Providence (Halifax) Church was organized.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Barbour, W. B. Halifax. Danville, VA. J.T. Townes Printing Co. Inc.,
1941. (See Continuation Sheet 6)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.36

Quadrangle name Conner Lake, VA

Quadrangle scale 1 : 24000

UTM References

A

1	7	6	9	4	1	8	0	4	0	8	9	9	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Beginning at a point at the NE corner of the intersection of VA Routes 624 and 623; thence extending approximately 175' NW following E side of VA 624; thence approximately (See Continuation Sheet 6)

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Howard J. Kittell, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date August 1987

street & number 26 Diman Place telephone (401) 351-6912

city or town Providence state Rhode Island 02906

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 H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell, Director
title Division of Historic Landmarks date June 2, 1988

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

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ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS (Continued)

on the other three sides of the structure. This feature was obviously an addition to the building following its completion, since the moldings along the roof edge of the main body do not carry over on to the eave.

The north wall has three equally spaced windows, while the south wall has only two windows which do not align with those on the opposite wall. All five windows are of the same size. double-hung, with nine over nine sash. As the entrance, the window surrounds are unmolded boards. Originally there was a heating stove between the windows on the south wall, the stove pipe from which extended through the wall and up the outside of the building. This accounts for the discrepancy between the number and spacing of the windows on the two lateral sides of the building. During the period from 1926 to 1982 all but one of the sash were lost. Those in use today were fashioned from the single remaining sash which was also reinstalled. Just as the sash, all but one of the original exterior blinds had also been lost over time. The one surviving blind was used as a pattern from which the reproductions were copied. The hardware for the blinds is original to the period of the building.

There are no openings in the west wall which is an unbroken clapboard surface.

The roof is steeply pitched, with the ridge running from east to west. Originally the roof was covered with wooden shingles, but these have since been replaced with a raised-seam metal covering. Below the roof line is a box eave with cyme reversa moldings at both its top and bottom.

Interior

The interior of the church is comprised of a single room which was used as the sanctuary. An open ceiling extends approximately two-thirds of the way from the top of the walls to the ridge, at which point a flat ceiling is introduced. Three beams each approximately 10 inches square with chamfered corners span the width of the interior, and are centered above each of the three windows on the north wall.

Random-width pine boards cover the floor. These were installed during the restoration, and are stained a reddish-brown to replicate the original flooring which had rotted. The floor boards run from the front to the rear of the structure.

A most curious and interesting feature of the interior is the wall cladding. This is comprised of boards and battens. However, unlike conventional board and batten exteriors, this is applied horizontally around the room, covering the underside of the roof and the ceiling as well. The random-width boards vary from 14 to 20 inches, with unornamented, uniform-width battens covering the horizontal joints. Thin, mullion-like strips cover the vertical joints between the boards. No attempt was made to

(See Continuation Sheet 2)

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Architectural Analysis (Continued)

align the boards horizontally around the room, so that at the corners the battens are staggered up the height of the wall.

The door, wall, and window trim on the interior is as spare as that on the exterior of the building. Battens were used for baseboards around the perimeter of the room. The window sills have beaded edges, and the surrounds are asymmetrically molded. The interior door surround is unmolded except for a narrow raised strip around its outer edge.

At the center of the west wall of the sanctuary is a raised platform one step above the floor level. Here is the lecturn for the church, modeled after that used from the late 19th century until 1926. The lecturn is made from pieces of wood salvaged from the restoration. One of the late 19th-century vintage pews used in the church has also survived. The remaining church furnishings also date to late in the last century.

The interior of the building reflects the spare and simple approach to religious worship that was and remains characteristic of the Presbyterian faith and its Calvinistic roots. Similar unadorned churches may be found in rural Virginia and elsewhere dating from the early to late 19th century.

There are no other buildings nor is there a graveyard associated with the former Providence Church or included in this nomination.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Significance (Continued)

During the years prior to 1830 the Halifax Presbyterians were fording the Staunton River or, when possible, crossing it by ferry to attend the Cub Creek Church. Some attendees were coming from as far as Berry Hill Plantation. At that time the Reverend Taylor had been preaching Presbyterian doctrine in the county on a circuit basis. He met with considerable success, reaching some of the most prominent and influential families in the county. Episcopal, Baptist, and Methodist congregations were, however, already firmly established south of the Staunton River by this date.

Surviving records from the Providence Church, Cub Creek Church or the Presbyterian Synod do not disclose what was the catalyst for the formation of this first Presbyterian congregation in Halifax County. This can only be inferred from known events. These include the effective preaching of Reverend Clement Read from the Cub Creek Church, the widespread and growing interest in Presbyterianism occasioned by the establishment of Union Theological Seminary in 1827, and, on a broader level, the effects of the

(See Continuation Sheet 3)

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Historical Significance (Continued)

"Benevolent Empire," the religious crusade for moral reform that spread across the young republic in the early decades of the 19th century. This movement served to promote social stabilization, nationalism, temperance, abolition, and the buddings of the women's rights movement. It also encouraged an active missionary movement for Presbyterianism that was represented in Reverend Taylor's work in Halifax County. Also in 1830 Samuel Davies established a Presbyterian academy in the county which, if not promoting the growth of the religion, at least testified to its popularity in the area.

At a somewhat more pragmatic level, the formation of a Presbyterian church in Halifax undoubtedly arose from the difficulty of crossing the Staunton River to Cub Creek (this had been specifically cited as a reason for the establishment of one of its other off-shoots). Also, the distance to Charlotte County for the growing number of Presbyterians in the south end of the county was undoubtedly a major contributing factor. And, lastly, a degree of county pride in having an independent and autonomous church would have encouraged the formation of the congregation.

On June 19 and 20 of 1830 a group of Presbyterians from the Cub Creek Church met at Halifax County Courthouse to discuss the organization of a congregation. The group included the Reverend Read and the Reverend Hiram P. Goodrich, a professor at Union Theological Sminary, along with Andrew Hart and James Knox, licentiates. These men, along with twnety-six local communicants organzed the Halifax Church as the first recognized Presbyterian congregationin the county. The original membership included the Carringtons, a family that by 1830 had distinguished itself in Virginia for over 100 years, the Cooks, Hotchkiss', Linns, and Ottersens. A majority of the membership, sixteen of the twenty-six, were blacks from the surrounding plantations. They would tend to comprise the majority of the membership throught the remainder of the 19th century.

The congregation met again in September 1830 and again in march of 1831 at the Halifax Courthouse to admit new members, hold communion, and baptise. It is assumed that no permanent minister had been assigned to the fledgling congregation during these first months since the church records fail to mention any one person as having officiated at the meetings.

On June 11, 1831 the membership met again. This time the name of Reverend Thomas A. Ogden appeared as moderator and clerk of the sessional meeting. Presumably, he was sent by teh Presbytery to supply this church with its needed minister. Also significant at this time was the location of the meeting in the village of Providence rather than at the Halifax Courthouse.

The relocation of the congregation to Providence would have been a natural and logical decision at that time. The village sat at the intersection of the roads leading to the two principal ferry crossings over the

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Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4Historical Significance (Continued)

Staunton River between Halifax and Charlotte counties. These were major transportation links from the northeast to the southwest portions of Virginia. The village was at that time developing as a commercial hub for the northeastern part of the county. By 1830 it possessed several stores, a post office and distilleries.

Membership in the church, initially called Halifax Church, grew rapidly during the early years, so that by 1835 the congregation numbered seventy communicants plus children in regular attendance. However, from 1836 to 1841 the congregation was without a regular pastor, so that services could only be held on a sporadic basis. This was not a totally unusual situation for any denomination in a rural area during the 19th century. It did, however, serve to erode the momentum of growth that had been established.

While documentary evidence has not surfaced to indicate where the members first assembled in Providence, it is likely that the original church building had been erected during the intervening months since June of 1830, and was then ready to receive the growing congregation. This assumption is supported by the fact that the Cub Creek Church gave each of its daughter churches "generous" contributions to be used to construct buildings for their congregations. Also, during these early years when the membership was growing rapidly there would have been the optimism to immediately launch into a building program. (However, by the early 1840s, after the establishment of a second Presbyterian church in the county, the membership began to decline.) Therefore, an early to mid-1830s construction date is both reasonable and supportable in light of the demographics and finances of the congregation.

This initial structure is a humble, vernacular building, its size a reflection of the size of the congregation. The one-story frame structure is a single room with gable-end entrance on the east side, three windows on the north side and two on the south, and an unbroken west or altar wall. The clapboard covered building is devoid of ornament, and bespeaks a rural congregation intent upon worship rather than display.

The interior of the church is as simple and the exterior, with modest asymmetrically molded surrounds framing the windows and double two-panel doors. The floor is covered with random-width pine planks, while the ceiling is open almost to the ridge-pole. What is most unique about the interior is the wall cladding, comprised of variable-width planks applied horizontally around the room. This same treatment extends on to the ceiling as well. Battens cover the horizontal joints between the planks. While vertical board and batten siding was gaining popularity at the time the church was constructed, no specific precedent exists for such an application of horizontal boards on an interior.

(See Continuation Sheet 5)

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Historical Significance (Continued)

This was the first of seven Presbyterian churches to eventually organize in the county. In 1842 the Halifax Church was formed at Halifax Court-house. Thereafter, the original Halifax Church was renamed the Providence Church. The founding of this second church severely sapped the strength of the Providence congregation, which began to decline after 1842. From 1855 until 1888 the church had a succession of ministers, none of whom remained more than three years. And there were numerous lapses in the holding of regular services even on a monthly basis. The congregation struggled for survival during the difficult years of the Civil War, going through several periods of inactivity beginning during the war, late during the Reconstruction period, and again in the mid-1880s. This was principally due to the dwindling membership and a dearth of ministers.

After 1890, the securing of uninterrupted pastorates was more common, although individual tenure rarely exceeded three years. However, by 1924 the membership had grown to approximately 120 persons plus children, and the church had developed a degree of financial stability. It was then decided to erect a new edifice to the north of the original building. This was accomplished, and the new church building was dedicated in 1926. In 1927, the original church building and land were sold to Nannie W. Tayman who had donated approximately eight acres of land for the new church site. From that time until the early 1980s the structure was used as a tobacco drying barn, for the storage of grain, and for other miscellaneous storage. It was during these years that the structure suffered greatly from neglect, until it became structurally unsound.

In 1947, the former church and 0.36 acre of land were sold to Walter E. Blanks by the children of Nannie Tayman. W.E. Blanks retained ownership of the property until 1980 when he transferred the title to his children: Kiester M. Blanks, Aubrey N. Blanks, Dorothy Blanks Allen, and Roy Blanks. After the passing of W.E. Blanks in 1981, his children undertook a painstaking and extensive restoration of the church as a memorial to their father and mother who had been married in this building before it was replaced in 1926. Following the restoration, the property title was transferred to the Blanks Memorial Trust, LTD. in 1985.

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9. Major Bibliographical References (Continued)

Brimms, Henry M. and William M.E. Rachel, ed. Yesterday and Tomorrow in the Synod of Virginia. Richmond: The Presbyterian Synod of Virginia, 1961

Brown, Rev. A. H. A History of Providence Church: Compiled From Its Sessional Records. N.P., September, 1888.

Carrington, Wirt Johnson. A History of Halifax County (Virginia). Richmond: Appeals Press, Inc., 1924.

Christian Observer. "New Building of Providence Presbyterian Church in Halifax County, Va.", December 1, 1926.

Edmunds, Pochahontus W. Halifax County, Virginia - History. 2 Volumes. N.P., N.D.

Gaines, Elizabeth Venable. Cub Creek Church and Congregation: 1738 - 1838. Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1931.

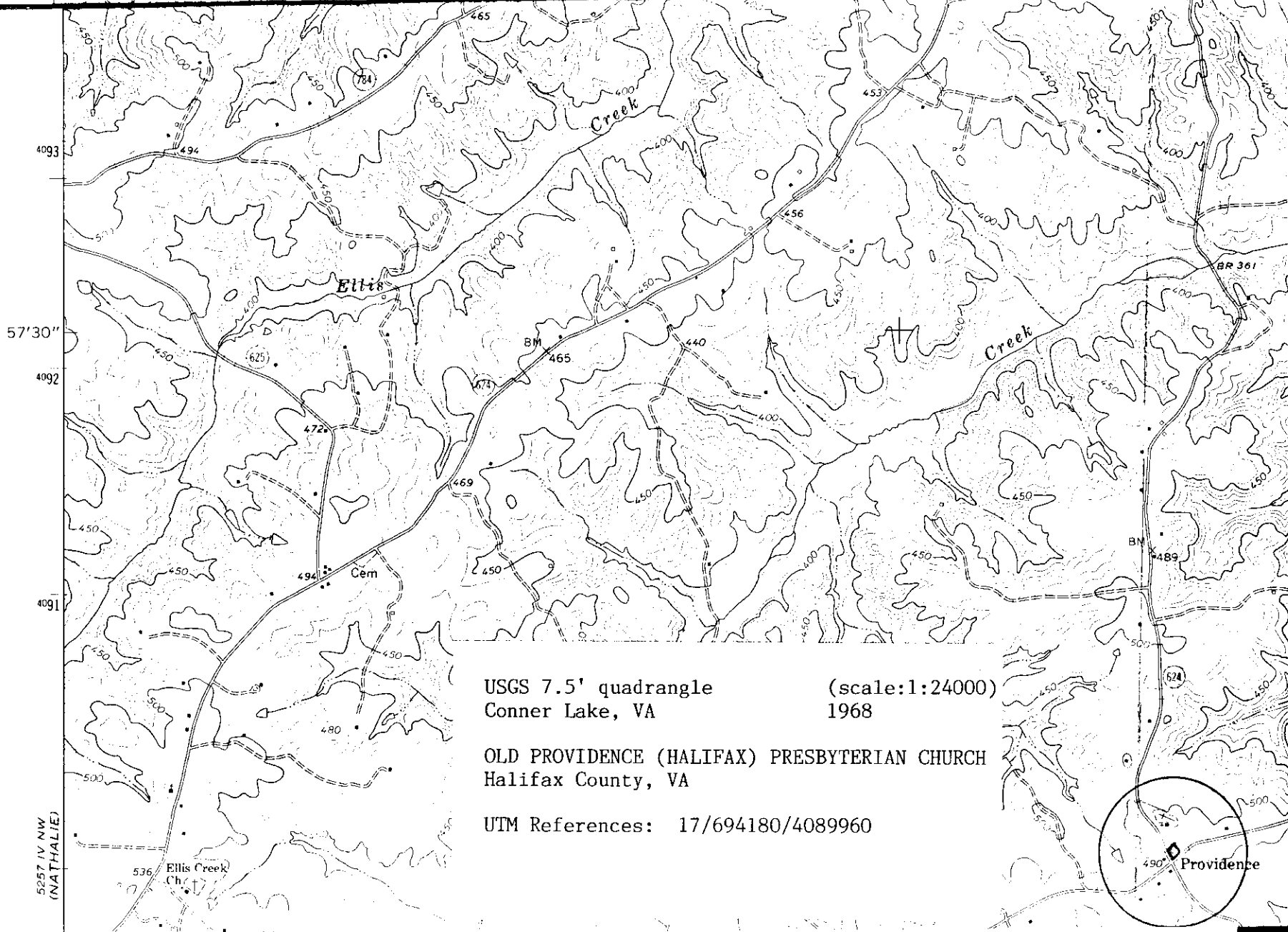
Halifax County
Deed Book 124, 139, 143, 173, 202, 448, 490.
Will Book 78
Plat Book 2

Leotscher, Cliffert A. A Brief History of Presbyterians. 3rd. Edition. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978.

Sessional Records of the Providence Presbyterian Church in Halifax County. N.P., 1830 - 1926.

10. Verbal Boundary Description (Continued) 200' NE; thence approximately 125' SE to a point on the N side of VA 623; thence approximately 225' SW following N side of VA 623 to point of origin.

The boundary includes all of the property owned by the Blanks Memorial Trust, LTD. on which the church is sited, and does not include any outbuildings nor a graveyard.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle
Conner Lake, VA

(scale:1:24000)
1968

OLD PROVIDENCE (HALIFAX) PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Halifax County, VA

UTM References: 17/694180/4089960