

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Walker Top Baptist Church

Morganton vicinity, Burke County, BK0092, Listed 08/01/2024
Nomination by Ivy Bridges, Bridges Legacy Holdings, inc.
Photographs by Sarah Woodard, January 2024



Overall view, camera facing north



Walker Top Baptist Church, south-southeast elevation, camera facing north-northwest

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Walker Top Baptist Church

Other names/site number: BK0092

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 7442 Burkemont Road

City or town: Morganton State: NC County: 023

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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



I hereby certify that this x 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 x 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 x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B x C D

 Signature of certifying official/Title: State Historic Preservation Officer	 Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

Walker Top Baptist Church
Name of Property

Burke County, N.C.
County and State

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

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
-

Walker Top Baptist Church
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Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

Walker Top Baptist Church
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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD/Log

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Please see continuation sheets.

Walker Top Baptist Church
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Narrative Description

Please see continuation sheets.

Walker Top Baptist Church
Name of Property

Burke County, N.C.
County and State

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

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

- 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

Walker Top Baptist Church
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Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
ca. 1845

Significant Dates
ca. 1845

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Please see continuation sheets.

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

Please see continuation sheets.

Walker Top Baptist Church
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Please see continuation sheets.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

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): BK0092

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 1.2 acres

Walker Top Baptist Church
Name of Property

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Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.639977 | Longitude: -81.723202 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The proposed boundary follows the north, west, and south boundaries of Burke County Tax Parcel 1699089839, and extends on the eastern edge to the edge of pavement along Burkemont Road.

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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary is a portion of the land owned by the Deal and Walker families, who built and supported Walker Top Baptist Church, and donated the parcel to the church. The boundary is sufficient to include the associated cemetery and picnic shelter and provide an ample and appropriate setting for the rural church.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Ivy Bridges
organization: Bridges Legacy Holdings, Inc.
street & number: 510 Prescott Street
city or town: Greensboro state: N.C. zip code: 27401
e-mail ivybridges08@gmail.com
telephone: 336-337-4518
date: July 19, 2023

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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Photographs

The following information pertains to each of the photographs:

Name of Property: Walker Top Baptist Church

City or Vicinity: Morganton Vicinity

County: Burke

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Sarah Woodard unless otherwise noted

Date Photographed: January 25, 2024 unless otherwise noted

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1. Overall view, camera facing north
2. Walker Top Baptist Church, south-southeast elevation, camera facing north-northwest
3. Walker Top Baptist Church, north corner, camera facing south
4. Walker Top Baptist Church, interior, southwest door, camera facing southwest, photo by Leisa Bridgers, 2023
5. Picnic Shelter, camera facing north-northwest
6. Cemetery, camera facing southeast
7. Cemetery, camera facing west
8. Overall view, camera facing west

The above-referenced views correspond to the Photo Key.

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.

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**National Register of Historic Places
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N/A
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Section number 7 Page 1

Section 7: Description

Summary Paragraph

Walker Top Baptist Church is situated at the top of Walker Top Mountain in southwestern Burke County in the South Mountains of western North Carolina. The northeast-facing church is a plain, one-room log building that oral tradition reports was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century. It stands alongside Burkemont Road, which transitions from paved to dirt immediately east of the church. A long picnic shelter extending to the southwest from the church’s western corner provides shelters for annual homecomings. To the south of the picnic shelter is a cemetery containing nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century burials.

Narrative Description

Walker Top Baptist Church is situated at the top of Walker Top Mountain in southwestern Burke County in the South Mountains of western North Carolina. The church, picnic shelter, and cemetery sit in a grassy area, nearly surrounded by woods with a small subdivision carved into the woods to the south. Cedar trees stand north of the cemetery, while deciduous trees dot the southwest section of the lawn.

Church, ca. 1845

One Contributing Building

The sanctuary is a simple, gable-roof, single-pen log building with half-dovetail notching and cement chinking. A single-leaf, batten door is centered on the southeast, side-gabled elevation. The door opening is framed with plain boards and is reached via three pre-cast concrete steps with a modern metal railing. A narrow, three paneled door attached with modern strap hinges occupies the southwest, gable-end elevation, and a shed-roof porch extends across the entire southwest elevation. The southwest gable is finished with weatherboards.

The northwest elevation contains a single, centered window with modern, one-over-one, replacement sash. The northeast elevation is the most elaborate side of the building. It features straight-edge wooden shingles in the gable end and a diminutive, projecting, single-bay, gabled, frame apse with modern replacement windows piercing each side of the apse.

A five-v metal roof with deep over hangs shelters the building. Modern, four-by-four wooden posts support the shed porch on the southwest elevation, but the main block stands on fieldstone piers. The east corners of the main block and of the apse rest only on single stones, nearly on the ground.

Interior

Vertically oriented planks sheath the interior, but this may be mid-twentieth-century paneling. The floorboards and ceiling boards are narrow and appear to date from the early twentieth century. The ceiling and floor of the apse are also wood planks but appear to be more recent installations.

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Picnic Shelter, ca. 1960

One Noncontributing Structure

A long picnic shelter extends to the southwest, off the church’s west corner. The shelter is an open-sided, gable roof pavilion constructed from log poles and pole trusses, and it shelters a long wooden table flanked by narrow, wooden benches. The picnic shelter has a dirt floor. A single wooden picnic table is located off of the north corner of the picnic shelter while a group of four picnic tables is located to the southwest of the picnic shelter.

Cemetery, ca. 1846

One Contributing Site

The cemetery occupies the lawn to the south of the picnic shelter. The cemetery contains approximately ninety-five burials, mostly dating from the early-twentieth century. The earliest marked burials are those of Clarey Dale, who died in 1846, and her husband, Alexander Dale, who died in 1859. The most recent burials date from the twenty-first century. Most markers are unmarked fieldstones. Marked tombstones are generally small and typical for their time period: early-twentieth-century marble and concrete vertical tablets and mid-twentieth-century granite markers, with some late twentieth or early twenty-first century plaques placed flush with the ground to commemorate unmarked burials. Markers are arranged in irregular lines, and most graves have a northeast-southwest orientation, with graves closer to Burkemont Road oriented closer to an east-west axis.

Statement of Archaeological Potential

According to the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology, the Walker Top Baptist Church is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological features produced by former fence lines, paths, plantings, and outbuildings, as well as materials that have accumulated through use of the church can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the church and its community members. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the church and these potential remains should be considered in any future improvements to the church property. In addition to having the potential to yield important information about the past, cemeteries and unmarked graves are protected by North Carolina General Statutes 14, 65 and 70. To date, no archaeological investigation has been done on the church or cemetery and the cemetery likely contains unmarked burials. The cemetery should be considered in any future archaeological research, landscaping, or restoration activities and should be avoided during any future construction or ground disturbing activities.

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Section 8: Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

Walker Top Baptist Church was constructed around 1845 and is a one-room, log church. An associated cemetery is adjacent to the church, and church members are buried there. The building is a rare survivor of a one-room, log church, which was a once-common building type, and it is historically significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Because the building derives its primary significance from its antebellum architecture, it meets Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties. Its period of significance is its date of construction, circa 1845. The church retains all seven aspects of integrity: location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, association, and feeling. While some interior materials have been repaired or replaced over time and original windows have been replaced with modern sash, the building continues to convey its historic significance.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Historical Background

The genesis of Burke County, NC, began in 1777 when Thomas Burke, a delegate in the Continental Congress and a future NC Governor, established it from Rowan County. Many Scots-Irish and German immigrants in the mid to late 18th century settled here. Most families in Burke County were not slave owners, although in 1833, a few years before the church was built, 5,000 slaves were mining gold in Burke County. At this time there were nearly 1,000 people living in Burke County.

The citizens of Burke County participated in the “Battle of Kings Mountain” which took place in South Carolina at the time of the American Revolution.

The history of Walker Top Baptist Church is tied tightly to the Dale (Anglicized from the German name, Diehl) and Walker families. Alexander Deal married Clarey England in Burke County around 1811, and the Deals first appeared in the Burke County Census of 1820.¹ Likely around 1848 or 1849, their daughter Matilda Deal (1825-1871), married Joseph Alexander Walker (1824-1910), whose parents arrived in the area in the 1770s. Joseph and Matilda met when Joseph was on a hunting trip in the area, and the young couple purchased land from Alexander Deal.²

Oral tradition holds that Joseph Walker donated some of this Deal land for the church and cemetery, and that same tradition consistently and strongly gives a construction date of 1842 for the building.

¹ U.S. Census, 1820, and Burke County Marriage Bonds, both accessed via ancestry.com, October 2023.

² Bobbie Sue Walker Ragan, “Joseph Alexander Walker,” in Burke County Historical Society, *Heritage of Burke County* (Winston-Salem, NC: Hunter Publishing Company, 1981), 450.

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However, it does not appear that Walker married into the Deal family that early. If the church was built earlier than 1842, Alexander and Clarey Deal are more likely to have been the founders and builders. Indeed, the earliest known burials in the cemetery are Clarey Dale, who died in 1846, and Alexander Dale, who died in 1859. If the church is younger and dates closer to 1850, it becomes more likely that Thomas and Matilda Walker built it. County deeds cannot shed light on this question because Union troops burned the county’s records in 1865.

Consistent oral history and the church’s earliest burials seem to place a church here from the early-to-mid-1840s, with ties to both the Deal and Walker families.

Architectural Context

Walker Top Baptist Church’s architecture is an example of what was likely the county’s most common antebellum church building configuration, but today, this building type is incredibly rare in the landscape.

One researcher contends that “before 1800 there were probably few structures of any kind built in Burke that were not log, and it [log] remained the predominant construction method well into the 1800s.”³ Log construction was expedient in heavily treed regions, and construction did not require a variety of tools, specialized skills, or more than a couple of men. From the earliest European settlement of North Carolina until the early twentieth century, North Carolinians executed log buildings in a wide array of finishes from plain structures to finely finished houses with plaster interiors and rich woodwork. Log buildings were used as all manner of outbuildings, houses, churches, schools, and stores: anything that one might build in frame, one could find in log.

Walker Top Baptist Church is part of this tradition of log construction. The building served both as a school and as a church for the surrounding community of tight-knit Walker family members.⁴ In describing groups who were particularly devoted to log construction, Randall Cotton notes that settlers in the South Mountains area of Burke County, where Walker Top is located, is one of the areas where the county retains its greatest concentrations of log buildings.⁵ Of Walker Top Baptist Church, specifically, Catherine Bishir writes, “the small log church was little different in form from the dwellings of families who worshiped there.”⁶

³ J. Randall Cotton, *Historic Burke: An Architectural Inventory of Burke County, North Carolina* (Asheville, NC: Biltmore Press, 1987), 16.

⁴ Catherine Bishir, Michael Southern, and Jennifer Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 161-162.

⁵ Cotton, 16.

⁶ Catherine Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, portable edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 218.

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It was constructed during a period of time, however, when congregants were moving toward frame buildings, often with more amenities or comforts than the old log churches.⁷ As denominations and church members prospered during the state’s antebellum, slavery-based affluence of the 1840s and 1850s, they could afford new and, presumably, better buildings. Thus, the twenty years preceding the Civil War saw a building boom in which frame, Greek Revival churches and houses became the standard symbol of prosperity for communities.

Church buildings, which often served as an advertisement of sorts for a congregation were, like commercial buildings, replaced or updated frequently to keep up with fashion and to display steadfast success. Churches, in particular, followed a pattern of replacement from log to frame to brick, which Historian Edward Phifer, Jr., recognized as a progression “from a brush arbor meeting to a one-room log church, later to a frame building, and finally to a red-brick structure.”⁸

Indeed, this is the pattern that Walker Top followed: a log church, followed by a frame building, followed by the present Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church, which is a brick building from the mid-twentieth century. In this progression, most churches tore down their old log building, but Walker Top’s congregants removed entirely to a location about four miles (as the crow flies) to the northwest.

Walker Top Baptist Church’s deviation from the pattern, by leaving the old log building rather than replacing it, provides us with a glimpse of what most church buildings in North Carolina looked like at one point in their life cycles. Walker Top Baptist Church retains integrity of location because it has not been moved. It retains its integrity of feeling, setting, and association as a remote, mountaintop church where cold winds and a steep climb to reach it would have kept only the hardest souls away in the winter and where a picnic shelter and mature trees welcome members in warmer months. Wide vistas through the trees surrounding the mountaintop remain open. The building retains its integrity of materials, design, and workmanship with original logs, form, fenestration, and pews. The congregation’s decision to move and the Walker family’s continued dedication to the building as a venue for a yearly family reunion has preserved with church with a remarkably high degree of integrity that allows the building to easily convey its historic significance as a log, mid-nineteenth-century church.

⁷ Bishir, 219.

⁸ Edward W. Phifer, Jr., *Burke County: A Brief History* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Culture Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979), 39.

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Section 9: Major Bibliographical References

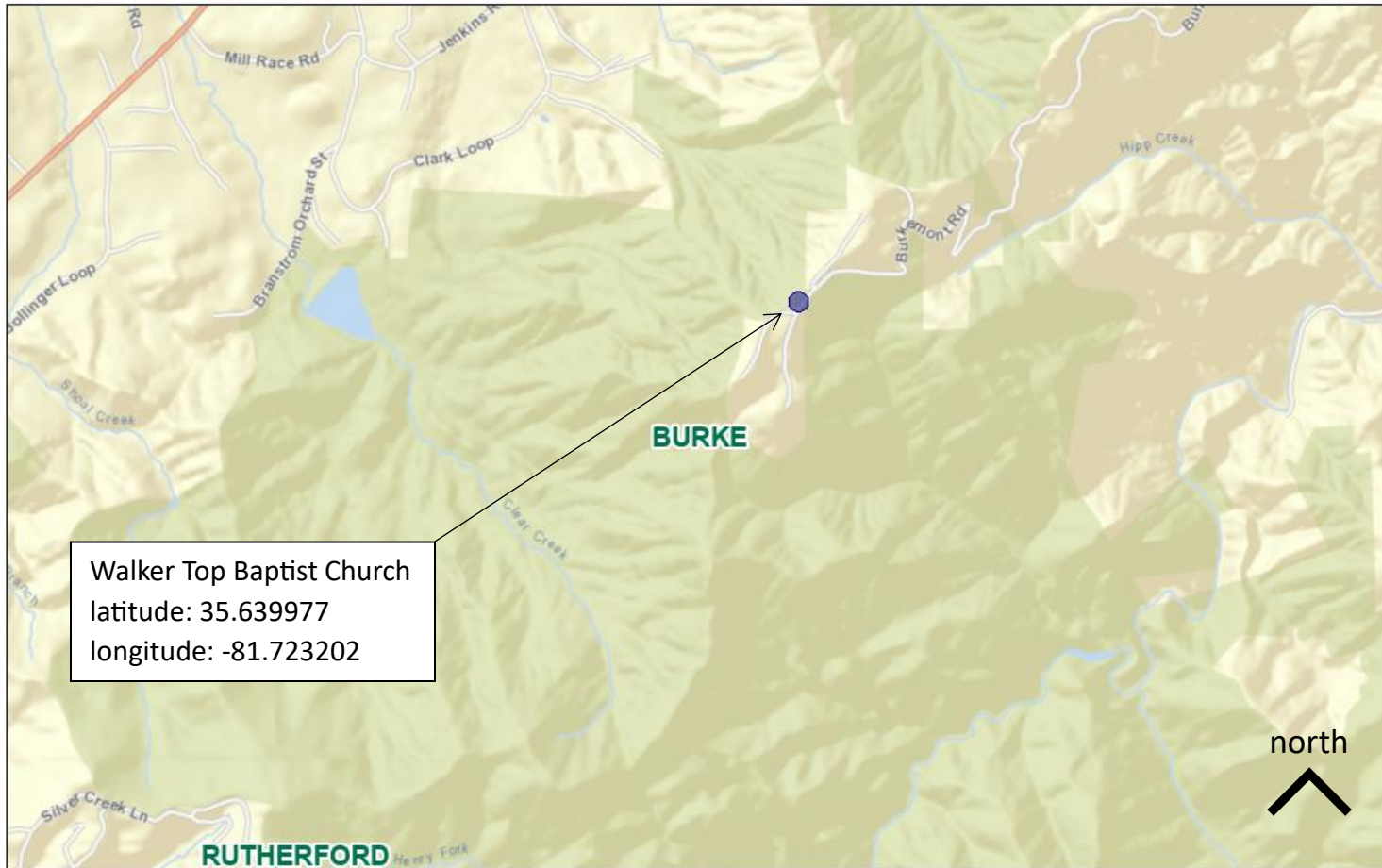
Bishir, Catherine. *North Carolina Architecture*. Portable edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolian Press, 2005.

Bishir, Catherine, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin. *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

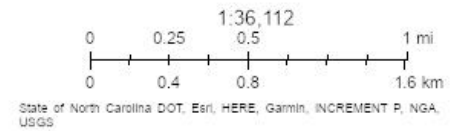
Phifer, Edward W., Jr. *Burke County: A Brief History*. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979.

Cotton, Randall, and Millie M. Barbee, ed. *Historic Burke: An Architectural Inventory of Burke County, North Carolina*. Asheville, NC: Biltmore Press, 1987.

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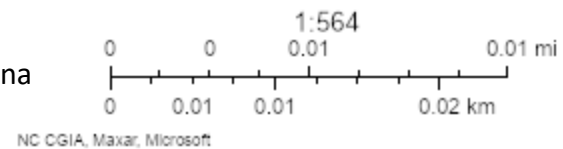
Walker Top Baptist Church Location Map
7442 Burkemont Road, Morganton Vicinity
Burke County, North Carolina



North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office



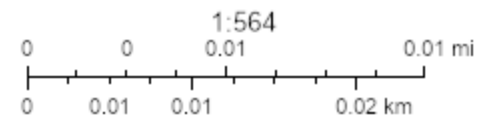
Walker Top Baptist Church National Register Boundary Map
7442 Burkemont Road, Morganton Vicinity, Burke County, North Carolina





Walker Top Baptist Church National Photo Key

7442 Burkemont Road, Morganton Vicinity, Burke County, North Carolina



NC CGIA, Maxar, Microsoft