

**LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**  
**John Wesley's Stand**  
**2921 Old County Farm Rd, Sophia, N.C. 27350**  
**Back Creek Township, Randolph County, N.C.**

**LOCAL LANDMARK SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

John Wesley's Stand is Randolph County's last remaining example of a once familiar sight: the open-air tabernacle or brush arbor. A tradition handed down through the years, is that John Wesley, the renowned English clergyman and founder of the Methodist Church, passed through the area while on his way to Charlotte from Pennsylvania. He supposedly stopped and preached at the site which was said to be popular as a deer stand and used by hunters on their drives from Back Creek to Caraway Mountain in the 1700's. John Wesley's Stand was started in 1903 by the Rev. J.F. Burkhead of Asheboro. Worship was first held under a brush arbor after which a small frame church building was erected in 1906. The tabernacle was built in 1921. Surrounding both was a campground with a complex of outbuildings including a kitchen, dining room and dormitories to house preachers and workers during the annual camp meeting period. The quartz rock pillars of the tabernacle are an echo of the popular Bungalow style of that time. Wooden lattice-work originally filled the space between the pillars. Such a recent example of antique religious form is unusual.

Rev. Burkhead served as pastor at John Wesley's Stand for 34 years. Some of the time he walked the 14 mile distance to and from his home in Asheboro. At the age of 78, in the final years of his ministry, Rev. Burkhead re-enacted the worship services of the circuit rider days. The aged minister, dressed in the attire of a clergyman of earlier years, rode a horse to the service while members of the congregation were also dressed in the old fashioned attire. Rev. Burkhead's ministry at John Wesley's Stand ended in 1938 and his death occurred on August 18, 1944. John Wesley's Stand was no longer used as a worship site and occasionally used for the storage of hay and farm equipment.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE (Reference Materials)**

Architectural Historic of Randolph County, 1985, Lowell McKay Whatley, Jr.  
The Randolph Room, Asheboro/Randolph Public Library  
Asheboro Magazine, The Stand, by: Mike Grant  
Courier-Tribune Newspaper, 1921 & 1981 Articles

A tradition that has been handed down in Randolph County is that in 1735, English evangelist John Wesley, who founded the Methodist Church, set out on a mission tour. He started in Charleston, S.C. and worked his way north to Pennsylvania. His goal with this tour was to spread the gospel to the early settlers, and Native Americans. As he travels north from Charlotte

he followed the old Indian trading path known as the Occaneechi Trail (translated as “where people gather”) he stopped in what is now Randolph County when he came across an open air deer stand used by hunters and settlers. John Wesley preached from this stand to the gathered hunters and settlers. This stand was popular by settlers and hunters on their drives from Back Creek to the Caraway Mountain in the 1700s. This combination of activity and events provided the inspiration for the name John Wesley’s Stand. Religious services continued at John Wesley’s Stand following the reputed visit of John Wesley and a brush arbor was first built, followed by a log church. This church became a circuit under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Services were discontinued during the Civil War.

Records in the Randolph Room of the Randolph Public Library lists a Methodist Episcopal Meeting at Moss’s Schoolhouse about a mile away from John Wesley’s Stand on what is now the City Lake Road. Available records in 1843 lists Sunday school class members. On the class roll for 1863-64, B.W. Burkhead was listed as “now in the Army”. Since the Rev. J.F. Burkhead’s parents, Lorenzo D. Burkhead and Martha Burkhead, were listed as members of the Moss’ Schoolhouse, it is believed that Rev. J.F. Burkhead’s ministry at John Wesley’s Stand was a resumption of the ministry which followed the reputed visit of John Wesley to the site which later became John Wesley’s Stand.

John Wesley’s Stand was started in 1903 by the Rev. J.F. (Frank) Burkhead of Asheboro. Worship was again first held under a brush arbor after which the church building was erected in 1906. The tabernacle was built in 1921. The tabernacle was 40 X 40 feet and was erected for a cost of around \$3000. Rev. Burkhead served as pastor at John Wesley’s Stand for 34 years. Some of this time he walked the entire distance of 14 miles to and from his home in Asheboro. At the age of 78, in the final years of his ministry at John Wesley’s Stand, Rev. Burkhead re-enacted the worship services of the circuit rider days. The aged minister, dressed in the attire of a clergyman of earlier years, rode a horse to the service. Members of the congregation were also dressed in old fashioned attire. There were three thousand people waiting to hear his sermon, with the men in one corner, and the women in the other corner. Rev. Burkhead’s ministry at John Wesley’s Stand ended in 1938. His death occurred on August 18, 1944, and he is buried across the road in the Robbins Graveyard.

The Robbins Graveyard existed many years before either the church or the tabernacle were built. The earliest date on any grave marker is 1851. But many graves, marked only by rocks placed upright, some that have fallen to the ground, appear to have been there prior to the burial of 1851. The last person to be buried in the cemetery was Daniel Clark Robbins, who died January 25, 1979. The cemetery also contains the graves of his parents, Thomas F. Robbins Sr. and Emma Millikan Robbins. Also buried in this cemetery is Christen D. Hedgecock, donor of the land for tabernacle, who died in 1940. Martha Harris Burkhead, mother of Rev. J. F. Burkhead, the founder of John Wesley’s Stand, is buried in the cemetery along with three of her children; Julius, William, and George, according to names listed on one of the monuments.

The land and building has since reverted to the Thomas F. Robbins heirs and it is no longer used for religious purposes.

### **STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The 1921 John Wesley's Stand meets local historic landmark criteria as it represents identification with the cultural and historic development of Randolph County. The unique location of John Wesley's Stand represents an established and visual feature in Randolph County.

### **MAPS AND PHOTOS**

A Geographical Information System (GIS) air photography map, (produced by the Randolph County Planning Department) of this property reflecting the structure and its relation to nearby streets and other buildings is included with this report. Digital photographs (including a compact disk) have been prepared by the County Planning Department reflecting exterior and interior features. Photographs also include landscape features and physical setting.

### **HISTORICAL RESEARCH CERTIFICATION**

Historical data used for this report will be reviewed in public hearing by the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission. A final record of approval will be reflected in the official minutes of the Commission.

---

Chairman, Randolph County Historic Landmark  
Preservation Commission

---

Date