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Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, Greensboro, Georgia

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

HABS NO. GA-303

LOCATION: 303 North Main Street, Greensboro, GA 30642. The church sits at the end of North Main Street with the front facade facing west and the south facade facing East North Street. The church is located two blocks north of the Greene County Courthouse and faces a vacant lot across the street. The church's geographic coordinates are 33.34433 N, 83.10552 W.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer was designed in the Carpenter Gothic architectural style, which is a variant of Gothic Revival. The Gothic Revival style has a medieval past and a strong association to liturgical Christianity and aristocracy. Carpenter Gothic design maintains the Gothic spirit of reverence and awe for the sacraments and retains delightful details of pointed arches, lancet windows grouped in duplicate or triplicate, a tower, steep gabled roofs, and stained-glass windows. Gothic features identified at the Church of the Redeemer are the steeply pitched gable roof; a central rectangular tower with steeple; vertical board and batten wood exterior detailing, which is repeated on interior walls; and pointed arched windows with colored glass. Board and batten are a characteristic of small wooden Gothic churches and help to create a sense of verticality, an essential element in churches. The interior has a steeply pitched roof framed on open trusses to create a lofty nave, an ecclesiastically appropriate detail. The most striking of the windows are a rose window in the steeple and a triple lancet window behind the altar on the east end of the building. Square panes of glass in red, blue, or yellow are set in a diamond pattern. The rose window, with an eight-pointed star in the center, was originally located on the west end of the sanctuary but was moved to the outside of the tower when the steeple was constructed. A small trefoil remains in the peak of the gable at the west end, and is matched by another at the east end, above the pointed arch of the lancet window. Further fenestration is provided by rectangular windows, three on each side, on the north and south walls of the sanctuary, with hoodmolds over them. The windows are diamond-paned with a clear glaze. Although the windows have hung sashes, the central muntins are wide to give the appearance of casement windows.

Reverend James Elliott commissioned his nephew, architect and builder Captain John Gibbes Barnwell, to design and construct the Church of the Redeemer in 1867. Born April 3, 1839 in Beaufort, South Carolina to a prominent well-educated Episcopalian family, Captain Barnwell was educated at Harvard College. According to *Crimson Confederates*, he was in the class of 1859 and therefore entered as a freshman in 1855. He practiced as an architect and an engineer in Georgia and Alabama after the Civil War;

however, it is unclear in what field he earned a degree. He died August 13, 1918, and is buried in Rome, Georgia.

Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), architect and an Episcopalian, was instrumental in bringing Gothic architectural design to small parish towns. He was born in England and immigrated to America in 1828. Before immigrating, he apprenticed as a carpenter. His 1852 pattern book, *Upjohn's Rural Architecture*, made 13th century Gothic architecture accessible to parish churches in small towns. These simplified churches, designed as wooden-frame structures rather than in stone, retained the "Gothic spirit" and made the popular Gothic architectural style accessible to rural communities.

Several Carpenter Gothic churches can be found in rural Georgia. They were built in the late 19th century after the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. This illustrates the Gothic style continued to be popular during this period and is an indication that Upjohn's design ideas were dispersed widely. In the rural South where Baptist, Methodist, and evangelical churches dominated the landscape, the buildings of these denominations typically were simpler in design. They used local building materials and were constructed mainly of wood, stone, and glass. Most structures were a rectangular shape with flat-arch windows, and many had a column of some type to reference the Trinity. Choices in materials reflected the community's limited financial resources. They were designed to suit the needs of the congregation. In 1868, when the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer was built, it was the only Episcopalian church of seven churches in Greene County and continues to be the only Episcopalian church today. The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer is the only Carpenter Gothic design in Greene County and is the first of its kind in Georgia. The church is significant in that it speaks to social, state and national history. The church's design reflects the collaboration between tradition, its congregants, leaders of the church, and the architect. It exemplifies ecclesiological Gothic architecture in the rural South.

DESCRIPTION: The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer is a single-story Carpenter Gothic style church. Typical of the style, it is of wooden-frame construction and sheathed in a board-and-batten design. The building is supported by fifteen brick piers. The main sanctuary was built in the late 1860s, in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, with a steeple added later. The gable roof over the sanctuary is steeply pitched, with flaring eaves. The steeple, at the west end of the church, consists of a square bell tower surmounted by a slender pyramid-shaped spire with a cross at the peak. The steeple base consists of square Doric columns topped by Roman arches, which give entry to a small sheltered area under the steeple. Pilasters attached to the building, frame the doorway opening into the sanctuary.

The building is cruciform in shape, with a small shed-roofed sacristy on the north side of the structure. This is balanced on the south side with a warming kitchen added in the 1960s, which has a steeply gabled roof with flared eaves to match the design of the main roof over the church. The most striking of the windows are a rose window in the steeple and a triple lancet window behind the altar on the east end of the building. Square panes of glass in red, blue, or yellow are set in a diamond pattern. The rose window, with an eight-pointed star in the center, was originally located on the west end of the sanctuary but was moved to the outside of the tower when the steeple was constructed. A small trefoil remains in the peak of the gable at the west end, and is matched by another at the east end, above the pointed arch of the lancet window. Further fenestration is provided by a set of three rectangular windows on the north and south walls of the sanctuary. These windows are diamond-paned with a clear glaze and mounted with decorative hood molds. Although the windows have hung sashes, the central muntins are wide to give the appearance of casement windows.

The interior reveals the striking scissor-truss construction of hand-hewn beams supporting the roof. To help stabilize against lateral forces, there is a king post anchored at the point where the trusses intersect. The church's decorative interior features typical Carpenter Gothic design details which include exposed framing with carved decorative chamfers on the posts, rafters, and trusses throughout the building. On the ceiling, along the outer truss beams, there are notches for the purlins to be set in. The walls are painted white, while the window frames and some of the supporting beams are darkly stained. A center aisle between the pews leads to the front of the sanctuary, where a baptismal font is placed one step up, with the carved wooden altar another step above that. The floor joists of the sanctuary run north to south, while the floorboards run perpendicular and span front to back with a tongue-and-groove pattern. The triple lancet window is behind the altar, with an ornate metal cross in front of the central window. Light, in addition to that from the windows, is provided by three ornate metal chandeliers that were originally made for oil lighting but have been converted to electricity.

HISTORY:

The congregation of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer formed in 1863, several years before the church was built. A hand-written church ledger begins with the date the parish was organized, September 21, 1863. The Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, the first Bishop of Georgia, met with the group on this date for the first parish communion in the home of Philip Clayton. A vestry (lay governing board of an Episcopal congregation) was established, with Mr. Clayton, John Carmichael, and Philip Poullain as members. The Rev. W. W. Lord, D.D., was identified as the "Missionary." Thus the church was founded during the Civil War, after the summer of 1863. Although the vestry members of the fledgling church were male, as was de rigueur for the time, the impetus for founding the congregation came from several women who had migrated from Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah to move farther from the war zone.

Here they met two families in Greensboro who were already Episcopalian. These “founding mothers” of the church included Miss Elizabeth Gilby, an English governess to the large Poullain family. They banded together in their desire to form a church for the town’s children since the nearest Episcopal church was in Madison, Georgia, in neighboring Morgan County. At the time, as continues to the present day, church membership in Greensboro and surrounding Greene County, was predominantly Baptist and Methodist.

The Redeemer congregation started with fourteen communicants who met in local homes. As attendance grew, they rented the town hall for worship services and started a building fund under the guidance of Bishop Elliott. On February 9, 1867, Miss Gilby made the first donation of \$100 dollars, which enabled the purchase of the plot of land on which the church was built. The land was previously owned by Holcomb G. Harper, father of Mrs. Philip Clayton. The church leaders hired J. G. Barnwell of Rome, Georgia, as builder and architect. Church histories state the building was completed in four months. Although the church is generally believed to have been built in 1868, the year in which the building was consecrated, references in the local newspaper, the Greensboro Herald, indicate the existence of a church building by the end of 1867. Church records indicate that as of this time, the Rev. Lord had been succeeded by the Rev. J. H. Elliott, “under whose pastorate a Handsome Church was enacted and consecrated by the Rt. Rev. J. W. Beckwith, the second bishop of the Diocese of Georgia.” The hand-written history records of the church go on to note that the Rev. Joshua Knowles became rector of the Church of the Redeemer in 1868. At the beginning, his service, like that of the Rev. Elliott, was in association with the Madison parish, a relationship that continued for several years. The Rev. Knowles served the Church of the Redeemer for nineteen years, until his death in 1887. He is buried with his wife in a Remembrance Garden adjacent to the church.

The church, which holds approximately 80 people, has remained small in membership, and by the 1970s its rolls had dwindled to only three or four families. During the lean years, local lay leaders sometimes led the services when a priest was not available, and the church was sometimes yoked with a church in a neighboring county. However, the creation of Lake Oconee in 1980, accompanied by rapid growth in golf and retirement lake communities, led to increased population in the area and membership in the church. In 2003, the vestry called a full-time priest for the first time in 20 years. The Church of the Redeemer “never gave up having regular services,” and now holds the distinction of being the oldest continuously worshiping church in Greene County.

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