

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

11 12

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Dorchester Road (S.C. Highway 642) not for publication \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Summerville vicinity X  
state South Carolina code SC county Dorchester code 035 zip code 29483

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide X locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mary W. Edmonds 1/10/05  
Signature of certifying official Date

Mary W. Edmonds, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, S.C. Dept. of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C.  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register

Linda McCallister

2/08/05

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the

National Register

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the

National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain):

Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery  
Name of Property

Dorchester County, South Carolina  
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing

Noncontributing

2

1

2

1

buildings  
sites  
structures  
objects  
Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register  
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Category: Religion  
Funerary

Subcategory: Religious Facility  
Cemetery

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Category: Vacant  
Funerary

Subcategory: Not In Use  
Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
walls Brick  
roof  
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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The Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery is a five-and-eight-tenths acre tract located on Dorchester Road (S.C. Highway 642) south of Summerville, South Carolina. The site includes the ruins of a late seventeenth to early eighteenth century brick sanctuary (or meeting house) and a late eighteenth to twentieth century cemetery.

Old White Meeting House was built ca. 1700, burned during the American Revolution in 1781, rebuilt in 1794, then reduced to ruins by the Charleston Earthquake of 1886. Constructed of brick and covered with stucco, it conformed to the typical "meeting house" plan of the colonial period, featuring a square building with a pyramidal roof. The dimensions of the Old White Meeting House as rebuilt in 1794 were 30'x 30'. The extant ruins include portions of each corner--the largest approximately 9' high--and significant remnants of the foundation and walls, clearly outlining the historic form, plan, and size of the meeting house.

The cemetery, which also contributes to the significance of the nominated property, surrounds the meeting house ruins and is laid out in a regular grid plan, with little discernible landscaping or other planned features other than an entrance gate and a few deciduous or evergreen trees shading particular family plots. Grave markers are primarily granite or marble tablets, obelisks, and table-top stones. The first marked graves in the cemetery date from the 1760s, and most burials date from the nineteenth century. Though many graves date from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century their number, size, scale, and placement do not impair the cemetery's overall historic character and appearance.

A large cemetery gate, constructed ca. 1990, does not contribute to the significance of the nominated property.

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**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 a grave.
- d a cemetery.
- e a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- f a commemorative property.
- g less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT  
RELIGION  
SOCIAL HISTORY  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1700-1886  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

ca. 1700  
1781  
1794  
1886

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

S.C. Dept. of Archives & History

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The Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery is a place of immense local significance in the Summerville area and one significant for its association with the early settlement of the colonial South Carolina lowcountry as well as the establishment, decline, and revitalization of a Congregational church--later a Presbyterian church--as a religious and social institution in this vicinity between 1696 and 1860.

The Meeting House, built ca. 1700 (several sources claim that it was built when the congregation was established 1696) and burned during the American Revolution, was rebuilt by 1796, abandoned soon after the Civil War, and finally reduced to ruins by the Charleston Earthquake of 1886. By 1895 the Meeting House ruins and the adjacent cemetery were regarded as a historic and sacred place, evoking memories of the congregations associated with the site from 1696 to 1886. The cemetery here, containing graves dating from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, was established while the White Meeting House was still an active church and then maintained through first its reorganization as the United Independent Congregational Church of Dorchester and Beech Hill in 1794 and then the creation of its successor church, the Summerville Presbyterian Church, in 1859.

The colonial town of Dorchester (often called "Old Dorchester," even as early as the nineteenth century) was founded in 1696 by a group of Congregationalists, better known as Puritans and also often called Dissenters, from Dorchester, Massachusetts, who emigrated to South Carolina intending to "settle the gospel there" and to establish a new congregation of believers.<sup>1</sup> The group, led by Rev. Joseph Lord, sailed from Boston in December 1695, arrived at Charleston by the end of the year, and eventually decided to settle up the Ashley River about 20 miles from its mouth. The town of Dorchester--named for the Massachusetts town, which was itself named for the English town--was laid out in early 1697, and the first religious services were held in a private house until a wooden meeting house was built near this site on the public road, often called "the Broad Path," one-and-a-half to two miles northwest of the town of Dorchester.

The Old White Meeting House, a brick church built to replace this first meeting house, was so named not because it was painted white but for the Rev. John White of England, the minister who had helped sponsor the establishment of Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1630.

By 1717, however, the population of the town had become as much Anglican as Congregationalist, and its growth, along with that of nearby settlements along the upper Ashley River, justified the creation of a new Anglican parish known as St. George's,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in George Sheldon, The Hand of God Recognized. A Discourse, Delivered on Sunday, 22d February, 1846, in the Independent or Congregational Church, at Dorchester, St. George's Parish, S.C., in Observance of the 150th Anniversary of the Building of the Church. Published by Request of the Congregation (Charleston: Burges and James, Printers, 1846), "Advertisement."

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Dorchester. A brick parish church, built in the town and known as St. George's Dorchester, was completed by 1720 and a tower and steeple were added by 1751. The ruins of the tower, all that survive of the parish church, still stand in Old Fort Dorchester State Park (listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969). The Old White Meeting House, in spite of the inroads made by the Anglicans, continued to serve its congregation for fifty more years.

By 1737, a second community in the vicinity was established at Beech Hill ; a Congregational meeting house was soon built there, with the minister of the Old White Meeting House holding alternate services at both churches. The Congregationalists occasionally allowed other sects or denominations to use its sanctuary, such as the occasion in 1744 when Rev. George Whitefield, the Anglican evangelical minister who was one of the catalysts for the American revival known as the Great Awakening, preached there on one of his many visits to South Carolina.

By the mid-eighteenth century the Dorchester Congregationalists, many of them slaveholders planting rice along the Ashley River and its tributaries, sought additional land and a more comfortable and healthy climate. They were not only drawn to coastal Georgia in search of those conditions but were also influenced by the knowledge that the colony's ban on slavery, imposed by its Trustees in 1735, had recently been lifted. In 1752 Rev. John Osgood and his congregation, about forty white families with an undetermined number of slaves, received land grants for almost 32,000 acres between Savannah and Brunswick. They soon migrated to Georgia and established a settlement there which they named Midway after the nearby Midway River. Within ten years most of the Dorchester congregation had left South Carolina ---and left the town of Dorchester to the Anglicans. The only real Congregational presence left in the area was the meeting house across the Ashley River from Dorchester at Beech Hill. The Old White Meeting House sat virtually abandoned for nearly fifty years, and by the end of the American Revolution a fire of unknown origin and years of neglect had taken their toll.

In 1793, shortly after the Revolution, the church was reorganized as "The United Independent Congregational Church of Dorchester and Beech Hill," reviving the dormant Old White congregation and merging it with the congregation at Beech Hill. The Old White Meeting House itself was extensively renovated over the next few years with the construction of a new interior and roof structure for the existing ca. 1700 exterior walls.

A summer planters' village two miles north of this site and four miles northwest of the old town of Dorchester had gradually grown up a short distance from the Ashley River after the Revolution and by 1811 was formally established as Summerville. Henry A.M. Smith has described early Summerville as "free from the pest of mosquitoes, and the nights, even in

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summer, fresh and invigorating," and many planters and families spent increasingly more time there than at Dorchester.<sup>2</sup> By 1831 the Congregationalists built a summer church in Summerville, where most of them worshipped from April to October or November, and by the end of the 1830s the old church at Dorchester was active more during the winter months than any other time of the year.

When the congregation celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 22 February 1846 the Old White Meeting House was described as

built a quarter of a century earlier than any other for a similar purpose in the neighborhood, and having stood a *century and a half*, [it] is a venerable memorial of the past, and an object of interest to those whose own or ancestral associations are connected with it.<sup>3</sup>

The Rev. George Sheldon, whose sermon "The Hand of God Recognized" was written and delivered especially for the occasion, told his flock,

We are among the memorials of the past. Every *brick* in these venerable walls, that have looked down *on five generations*, has a tongue, that utters thanksgiving to God, and solemn, wholesome admonition to us. . . . We cannot but be reminded, by the associations of this occasion, that long ere *another* such anniversary as we now observe shall occur, our heads will be laid. On that day, neither we nor our children will be here.<sup>4</sup>

By 1859, on the eve of the Civil War, the Congregationalists in Dorchester and Summerville joined together to establish the Summerville Presbyterian Church, which applied for and was soon admitted into the Charleston Presbytery. This church, still active, is the successor congregation to that of the Old White Meeting House and was granted all the property, "real and personal, of the United Independent Congregational Church of Dorchester and Beach Hill, in the Parishes of St. George and St. Paul" by an act of the South Carolina General Assembly dated 21 December 1882.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Henry A.M. Smith, "The Town of Dorchester, in South Carolina – A Sketch of its History," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine VI:2 (April 1905), 86.

<sup>3</sup>Sheldon, The Hand of God, "Advertisement," Emphasis in original.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 22; emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup>Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, Passed at the Regular Session of 1882. Printed by Order of the General Assembly, and Designed to Form a Part of the Eighteenth Volume of the Statutes at Large, Commencing with the Acts of the Regular Session of 1882 (Columbia: Charles A. Calvo, Jr., State Printer, 1883), pp. 32-33.

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From its beginnings the congregation at Summerville Presbyterian Church has considered the Old White Meeting House its "mother church," and area residents ever since have also regarded the site here as one of the most significant historic places in the South Carolina lowcountry. Ample evidence from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, furthermore, demonstrates that the Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery is significant as an example of how communities have always associated places on the landscape with their shared history.

In 1860, the year after Summerville Presbyterian was founded, Elizabeth Anne Poyas's chapter "Old Dorchester" in her history *Our Forefathers: Their Homes and Their Churches* contained a brief description of the Old White Meeting House and its history up to the beginning of her present—that is, the nineteenth—century:

The church at Dorchester on the northeast bank of the Ashley River was commenced to be built in 1696 by a colony from Dorchester, Massachusetts, which removed with their minister, the Rev. Mr. Lord, and left again (for the most part) in 1752 under the care of his successor . . . for Midway, Liberty County, Georgia, where they built a church thirty miles south of Savannah. The Revolution broke up and scattered the [Dorchester] congregation. . . . In 1790 the rebuilding of the Congregational Church or Meeting House (on the same foundation, and a part of the walls remaining in perfect strength) began to be agitated and subscriptions taken. Those who contributed to the noble work were of various denominations, and many residing at a distance. . . . They began in 1793 to cart bricks from the old parsonage at the Episcopal Church of Dorchester out to repair the Meeting House and in spring of 1796 the church was finished and the small congregation returned to their ancient but renovated moorings after an absence of forty three years. This was truly the centennial of their place of worship, just as it had at first been built in 1696. It had not been transformed into new or loftier proportions; it was simply repaired, the foundation and part of the walls have never been demolished.<sup>6</sup>

The old church still functioned as a sanctuary during the fall and winter months until 1866, the year after the Civil War ended. An 1895 history of the Summerville Presbyterian Church observed that the war "made the plantations near the Dorchester church practically valueless for agricultural purposes, [and] the need of Church privileges at the old sanctuary ceased."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Elizabeth Anne Poyas, *Our Forefathers: Their Homes and Their Churches*. By the Author of "Carolina in the Olden Time." (Charleston: Walker, Evans, and Company, 1860).

<sup>7</sup>Summerville Presbyterian Church, *Services at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the New Presbyterian Church of Summerville, S.C., May 7, 1895, and of the Dedication of the New Church, Dec. 15, 1895: Together with a Sketch of the Origin and History of the Organization* (Charleston: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell, 1895).



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Constance Fenimore Woolson, writing in the *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1875—only nine years afterwards—described the Old White Meeting House as located "in thick woods, with scarcely a track leading to its door. It was an Independent Congregational church, and is called in the neighborhood the Old White. It celebrated its one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary in 1846; but no services have been held there for many years save those of the wind, the rain, and the birds."<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Charles S. Vedder of the Summerville Presbyterian Church observed in 1895, in an address celebrating the dedication of a new sanctuary built two miles from this site, that "the venerable structure fell into decay, which the earthquake of 1886 made an utter ruin."<sup>9</sup>

The 1905 description of the Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery by eminent South Carolina historian Henry A.M. Smith is still an apt one, even one hundred years later:

The ruins (that is of this Church) stand among a grove of trees with quite an extensive country grave-yard around them.<sup>10</sup>

The Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery is significant as a site associated with one of the earliest permanent settlements in South Carolina, one associated with the origins of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations in the vicinity, and one recognized as early as the mid-nineteenth century as historic, not only as the site of the church and cemetery, but as the scene of many significant occurrences in the social and religious history of the community.

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<sup>8</sup>Constance Fenimore Woolson, "Up the Ashley and Cooper," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* CCCVII: LII (December 1875), 11.

<sup>9</sup>Summerville Presbyterian Church, Services at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the New Presbyterian Church of Summerville... and of the Dedication of the New Church.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, "The Town of Dorchester," p. 93. See also Walker, Dorchester County, pp. 86-106, 133-36, 283-85; Daniel J. Bell, Old Dorchester State Park: Visitor's Guide (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, State Park System, 1995); Francis J. Bremer, "A New Errand': Massachusetts Puritans and the Founding of Dorchester, South Carolina," Bulletin of the Congregational Library (American Congregational Association, Boston), 28:2 (Winter 1977); O.E. Johnson, The Summerville Presbyterian Church, Summerville S.C.: A Sketch of Its Origin and History (Summerville, S.C., n.p., 1894; reprint ed., McIntosh, Ga.: W.N. Beckett, 1929); James Stacy, History and Published Records of the Midway Congregational Church (Newnan, Georgia: S.W. Murray, 1894, 1903, reprint ed., 1951), p. 12; "Minutes of the Meetings of Members and Supporters of Congregational Church Dorchester, 1794-1819," Summerville Presbyterian Church, Summerville, S.C.; Poyas, Our Forefathers; George Howe, History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina. Volume I (Columbia: Duffie and Chapman, 1870), 120-21, 268-270, 463, 566-69; and Summerville Presbyterian Church, Services at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the New Presbyterian Church of Summerville... and of the Dedication of the New Church.

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The ruins of the historic church and the graves and plots in the historic cemetery still convey that long history remarkably well, and the integrity of the setting, feeling, and association here make the Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a truly *historic place*.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the line marked "Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery" on the accompanying Dorchester County Tax Map 153-00-00, Parcel 29, drawn at a scale of 1"=400'.

**Verbal Boundary Justification**

The nominated property is restricted to the parcel containing the Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery and historically associated with those resources.

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The following information is the same for each of the photographs:

Name of Property: Old White Meeting House Ruins and Cemetery  
Location of Property: S.C. Hwy. 642, Summerville vicinity  
Dorchester County, South Carolina  
Name of Photographer: Summerville Presbyterian Church  
Date of Photographs: July 1996  
Location of Original: S.C. Department of Archives & History, Columbia, S.C.  
Negatives

1. View of northeast corner and north wall ruins
2. View of north wall ruins
3. View of north wall ruins
4. View of east wall ruins
5. View of east wall ruins
6. View of south wall ruins
7. View of cemetery facing southeast
8. View of cemetery facing west
9. Grave of Samuel Stevens
10. Grave of Mary Stevens (d. 1761)
11. Grave of Harriet Scott (d. 1822)
12. Grave of Robert I. Limehouse (d. 1881)
13. Grave of Isaac T. Brown (d. 1891)

# AND CEMETERY, DORCHESTER COUNTY

MONCK'S CORNER 18 MI  
SUMMERSVILLE 1.3 MI.

4950 II SW SUMMERSVILLE 0.5 MI.  
(SUMMERSVILLE)

12'30"

575

577

10' 578

