



*Cokesbury
United Methodist
Church*

Stedman, North Carolina

HISTORY



This book provides a walk back through the history of our church and community. From its pages we seem to hear the voices of the past as they gathered to sing praises to God's Holy name.

For the information compiled herein, we are indebted to Mrs. Virginia Pennington Autry and Mrs. Barbara M. Layton, to which we owe a debt of gratitude.

We look about us at the beautiful sanctuary, the class rooms, fellowship hall and realize how blessed we are for those of the past who dedicated themselves to God and his service in this community. It has not always been an easy task to provide a place of worship for those who would come this way. Along with the building materials, there was also some sweat and sacrifice that went into the construction and I am sure there was lots of love and Christian fellowship also.

To our Methodist forefathers of this community, we owe so much for the rich christian heritage they left for us. We can pay that debt only if we build upon that which they gave us and pass it on to those who will follow along with God's eternal love.

*Your Pastor
A. H. Williams*

H I S T O R Y

Cokesbury United Methodist Church Stedman, North Carolina

Church histories, like histories of governments and empires, on the surface, often appear to consist of dates and events. So does our church history often appear to be just facts and figures. Therefore, let us remind ourselves, while reading its history, that behind each event in the history of Cokesbury Methodist Church, Stedman, North Carolina, there is a steady march of God's people - some known and others unknown. Yet, they are kindred souls whose inward spirits have shaped the church's destiny and are guiding its children toward God.

Until the late 1880's Stedman was known as Blockersville. The original deed of 200 acres, on which the town stands, dated in 1791, is now in the possession of Mrs. J. C. Bryant, heirs. The town's first educational facility was an academy located in the east of Stedman on property now owned by L. Dawson Carr. On the Sabbath Day this building was used by Blockersville citizens for a community church school and song service. The singing often lasted until past the lunch hour - much to the chagrin of some of its food-loving members. Later in the day, this same band of pious people continued their religious services by journeying 2 miles east of Stedman to the Sandy Creek Meeting House, there joining with others, for preaching services. As to this Meeting House, the following appeared in the Fayetteville Observer, December 22, 1926 or thereabouts.

"It (Sandy Creek Meeting House) was used for a three-fold purpose of a house of worship by the Missionary Baptist Church; a house of worship by the pioneer Methodist Church; and as a school house for the education of the youth of the day... it was visited by a number of the noted Baptist Ministers of the day, among whom were the Rev. Wood, Rev. Woodard, Billie Ayers, David Thames and other less noted divines who held services within its sacred walls.

According to local tradition the celebrated Bishop Bascom held services within its walls upon one occasion, while the Rev. Dr. William Closs preached there on different occasions, and the Rev. Love Culbreth, who was one of the most pious, consecrated and beloved local Methodist preachers of his day, held services there on numerous occasions during the last years in which it was used as a Union meeting house."

Finally the two denominations agreeably "went their separate ways," each congregation building its own house of worship. The Methodists erected a building of one large room west of Stedman upon the property of Alexander Maxwell I -- the Grandfather and Great-grandfather of some of our present members. Mr. Maxwell officially donated the land "for as long as the congregation wished to use it" as a place of worship.

During 1853 the congregation purchased a parsonage as a home for its pastor. It was located in east Stedman, very near the home of L. Dawson Carr.

The deed was made by George W. Bullard to Blackmon Culbreth, Love Wilson Faircloth, Alexander Maxwell I, and J. C. Blocker, acting as "Trustees of the Parsonage."

During the summer of 1877 another change took place. The members voted to move to a location nearer Blockersville. The new house of worship was about twice as large as that on the Maxwell property. It was located on 2 acres of the A. C. and B. F. Bullard property on the old Fayetteville-New Bern Road, about 1¼ miles from the present location. This property was an outright gift to the church by the Bullard Brothers. For 41 years this remained Cokesbury Methodist Church. Afterward this property rejoined the Bullard property, being bought from the church by A. C. Bullard.

During the Rev. G. W. Starling's 3 years as pastor (1897-1899 inclusive) a new parsonage was erected on Euclid Avenue. It faces the Mrs. J. W. McMillan residence....The cost of the building, six rooms, was borne by the Cokesbury Circuit.

Then in 1916-17, with A. C. Bullard, J. D. Geddie, Edward C. Blake, David Sessoms, Jeff Sessoms, D. H. Maxwell, A. B. Maxwell, Frank Carr, J. G. Autry, W. B. Maxwell, John E. Fussell, C. C. Culbreth and others as leaders, a new church of gothic design, wooden exterior, plastered walls, stained ceiling, elevated floor and separate classrooms was built on Euclid Avenue. The property, located about a block from the parsonage, was another acre in size. Mr. David Sessoms was instrumental in obtaining the land. His daughter, Blanche Sessoms Autry, was affiliated with Cokesbury Methodist Church longer than most present members. The church on Euclid Avenue was the center of religious services - weddings, funerals, christenings and pledges of faith until the property was sold to B. E. Blake.

Research has brought to light the names of many superintendents that have served the church since its organization, namely:

David Sessoms	Rev. N.M.McDonald	B.T.Williams	Lloyd Langley
David Benjamin Augry	C. S. Beard	A. W. Blake	Wm. C. Culbreth
Edgar L. Strickland	Frank Carr	Raymond Maxwell	Milton Jordan
Henry Sessoms	J. B. Garmon	E. F. Hubbard	John Aman
A. C. Bullard	George N. McCall	Lacy Maxwell	John P. McCall
A. B. Maxwell	C. C. Culbreth	Burris Blake	

The pastors list appears to be complete from the year 1873 until today. The following names appear in the church records in the chronological order in which they served:

J. B. Bailey	C. M. Gentry	G. O. Green
J. Mahony	A. M. Lowe	A. D. Betts
W. Smith	L. Keene	L. H. Joyner
M. W. Boyles	I. A. White	N. M. McDonald
G. W. Hardison	P. Greening	J. D. Pegram
F. A. Bishop	A. Futurell	F. E. Dixon
J. C. Crisp	G. W. Starling	W. E. Brown

J. L. McNeer	H. R. Ashemore	A. D. Byrd
J. A. Tharpe	R. E. Atkinson	L. A. Watts
R. F. Taylor	I. J. Strawbridge	A. L. Reynolds
E. C. Spell	W. F. Elliott	Morris L. Husted
W. A. Piland	W. H. Brady	Foster Jones
S. S. Ellington	Brooks Patten	Jack Hunter
E. W. Hocutt, Jr.	C. B. Long	Roger Thompson
C. H. Cavaness	J. W. Dimmette	John Roberts
		David Jones

For many years the stewards served together in financial matters. Then in 1921, B. T. Williams became the treasurer and served continuously except for a 2 year period that J. G. Autry acted as treasurer, until his death. Other treasurers serving faithfully have been Lloyd Langley, and Bonner Hubbard.

By reference, we find that until 1891, Cokesbury Methodist Church was under the jurisdiction of the Wilmington District of the N.C. Conference. Then it was transferred to the Fayetteville District in which it has remained with the exception of the years 1932-37 when it was again in the Wilmington District. Cokesbury was changed to a station church during A. D. Byrd's pastorate.

The new church and educational edifice is located on Highway #24, just east of Stedman Jr. High School. Actual work on the building began in April 1952. The building fund was begun during Rev. W. F. Elliott's appointment as pastor and the harvest sales and suppers continued to support the building fund during Rev. W. H. Brady's pastorate. Rev. Brooks Patten established an annual budget for each Sunday School Class.... with the money to be contributed toward the building fund. The treasurer of the building fund when it was first started was Bruce Culbreth. Then, in 1945 Roland Strickland became the building fund treasurer. The original cost of the church was approximately \$70,000.00.

The church is of Georgian Architecture, featuring colonial face brick, a slender white spire and cross, and huge white cylindrical columns. The main sanctuary has a seating capacity of 345 and above the choir is a rose window depicting Christ in Gethsemane. The church's architect was the late H. Colvin Linthicum of Raleigh, North Carolina. The Building Committee was composed of George N. McCall, Chairman; Bainbridge T. Williams, Sr., Charles L. McCall, Sr., with an advisory committee of Raymond H. Maxwell, William Love Culbreth, A. Welch Blake & Ernest F. Hubbard, Sr.

In 1956 $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of land was purchased adjoining the east side of the church property for a new parsonage. The Parsonage Building Committee was chaired by Burris Blake and is a brick structure in keeping with the church facility. Rev. A. L. Reynolds and family first occupied the new parsonage.

The Woman's Society of Christian Service has been active at Cokesbury at least 50 years. In the early beginning, members were joint with the Baptist Church. Later Circles were formed for age groups, prior to the existing WSCS. There was a period of time when the Methodist and Baptist youth held meetings together.

The United Methodist Men at Cokesbury received their Charter during the John Roberts Pastorate.

The property back of the church, amounting to some over an acre, was purchased in 1972. It is used for additional parking area and recreation.

Sometimes the obstacles involving the church appeared to be unsurmountable, sometimes trivial. Church Pastors have come and gone, Superintendent has followed Superintendent, Class Teacher has relieved teacher. Many Musicians, Choir Directors, Singers, Pianist, Organist.... including the child who operated the hand instrument for the Organist in the old church when her feet became too tired to pump the pedals..... Each in his own way has contributed his time and talent to the furthering of the Lord's work.

As we celebrate 200 years of American Freedom today, let us not forget the many individuals who do not necessarily have their name recorded on Cokesbury's commemoration plates, pews, windows, or hymnals... yet, their efforts in baking items to sell, making needlecrafts, and bringing items for poundings.... have all contributed toward our church moving Onward and Forward!!!

HISTORIANS

(Mrs.) Virginia Pennington Autry
(Mrs.) Barbara M. Layton

July 4, 1976

Note: If additions, or corrections, should be made to this history, do not hesitate to contact either of the historians. Information has been obtained from so many sources, there is a possibility corrections may be needed.