

HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF  
ST. JAMES METHODIST CHURCH  
TARBORO, N. C.

By MISS KATE SPRAGINS

The Centennial of Saint James, now being observed, dates from the first building erected on the present site at the corner of St. James and St. Andrews Streets in 1855. The dates 1855-1955 do not embrace almost a hundred years of previous Methodist history which varied greatly in its vitality in Tarboro during the period 1760-1855.

There were only a few Methodists in Edgecombe County in 1760, the year Tarboro was incorporated. Bishop Asbury's journals give accounts of his visits to the County and Tarboro, but he does not mention any church building until 1802. A chapel was then erected in Tarboro and dedicated the same year by Bishop Asbury and Rev. Nicholas Snithen. In 1803 Bishop Asbury visited Tarboro and preached in the new chapel. Of this visit he said, "Very few of the thirty-three families in Tarboro were in the church. The congregation consisted largely of thirty Africans. The people have more trade than religion, more wealth than grace." He complained that the well-to-do planters would not come out themselves, and would not permit their slaves to come, because they feared the effect of the Gospel on the blacks. The Virginia Conference met in Tarboro, February 1, 1809, with Bishop Asbury presiding. There were 84 ministers present and 17 were admitted on trial. The Methodists in North Carolina were in the Virginia Conference at this time. The Annual Conference Meeting in Tarboro gave some prestige to Methodism and greatly stimulated the work here. It is said that more than 2000 people attended the two services. Bishop McKendree, the first native born American bishop preached one sermon and Bishop Asbury the other, on the subject, "Humiliation Before God." The growth of the church was considerable from 1760 to 1815. After the death of Bishop Asbury in 1816 Methodism lapsed for a few years. The church in Tarboro went out of existence. The few members left worshipped in the public meeting house. About 1830 Tarboro was again designated as a part of the Tar River Circuit, and in the same year a new chapel was built. A big camp meeting was held here in 1836, and religious interest began to grow. Two years later the Tarboro church was reported in good standing and favor with the Annual Conference. From this time on through 1854, the church enjoyed continued growth through the intensive preaching and efforts of men like Rev. S. Pierce, H. H. Gibbon (Presiding Elder), Nathan Anderson and others. As the results of their labors the chapel was soon inadequate. In 1855 during the pastorate of Rev. B. F. Guthrie, Mr. F. L. Bond, a prosperous merchant of Tarboro, almost jeopardized his business in promoting the building of a new church. It was erected on the site of the present church. The new church was finished and dedicated on the fourth Monday in October 1856. Rev. C. F. Deems dedicated the church. Rev. Thomas G. Lowe and Rev. William Glass assisted in the service. The church at Tarboro was hardly completed before the opening scenes of the War Between the States checked all church activities. Rev. Joseph B. Bobbitt was at Tarboro Station in 1860. Rev. Mr. Hight held revivals in Tarboro in 1862 and 1863, but the people were too absorbed in war to give much attention to church work. Rev. Fred Mallett assisted in the church work during the war, and visited the Tarboro church as late as 1884. At the request of the Confederate Government the church bell was given to be

used for war materials. The closing years of the war found Rev. J. W. Jenkins in charge at Tarboro in 1866. The Rev. Mr. Jenkins was later the founder of the Methodist Orphanage in Raleigh. He and Rev. M. S. Moran succeeded in reviving the church and getting it on its feet again. Among the stewards serving at this time were H. X. Palmer, E. A. Therm, Marcus Battle, R. E. Weathersbee, Charles Latham, John Authar, James Clark and S. A. Long. The Annual Conference met in Tarboro in 1870. Bishop McKendree, the second, presided. Prior to 1870 there is no record of local leadership except Lawrence Toole, a Mr. Hall and F. L. Bond. Since 1870 the strong and influential leaders of the church were Dr. John Wesley Jones, Thomas H. Gatlin, Nathan M. Lawrence, J. M. Spragins, George F. Terrell, J. K. Wheeler, B. J. Keech, and L. H. Pender. These men served as stewards, class leaders, Sunday School superintendents, trustees and secretaries of church conferences. In 1888 Tarboro was made a separate station. There were 284 members, a church worth \$6000.00 and a parsonage worth \$2000.00. The official board of the church met in January 1891 and resolved to build a chapel on their lot in West Tarboro in order to carry on their missionary work. W. E. Fountain, T. H. Gatlin, N. M. Lawrence and W. D. Sharpe were the committee selected to erect this chapel. One of the largest revivals on record occurred there under the Rev. L. B. Jones. This chapel was named "Keech's Chapel" in honor of Bryan J. Keech. Another chapel was built in Hart Mill Village which was called "Dean's Chapel" in honor of W. T. Deans. These chapels were active for a number of years, but services were finally discontinued and the buildings sold. From about 1900 to 1935 we find the following men taking an active part in the work of the church: Capt. Paul Jones, W. T. Deans, G. T. DeBerry, C. B. Keech, Dr. J. P. Keech, S. R. Alley, L. V. Hart, Dr. J. P. Jenkins, Raeford Liles, C. C. Biggerstaff, W. O. Howard, M. G. Mann, O. B. Liscomb, E. V. Harris, W. C. Baker, and O. O. Boykin. The Reverend H. I. Glass was appointed pastor of Saint James in the late fall of 1914. While Sunday School was in session on the morning of March 14, 1915, it was discovered that the building was on fire. Every one was safely gotten out, and the members were able to save the furniture, pews and carpet. The furniture and pews are still in use in the present church. Following the fire, worship services were held in the Jewish Synagogue until another building could be erected. From the Quarterly Conference records we learn that the cornerstone of the new church was laid in 1916, and the first service was held on October 1, 1918. Thirteen years later, on the morning of September 27, 1931, the Church was dedicated by Bishop Collins Denny of Richmond, Virginia. The Dedicatory Sermon was preached from Galatians 6:10, "As ye, therefore, have opportunity, do good unto all men; especially them who are of the household of faith." At the evening service on this date, the Reverend H. I. Glass, former pastor, serving at Washington, N. C., preached to a large congregation. By the year 1944 enlarged and improved facilities were very much needed at Saint James. A fund for this purpose was started during the pastorate of the Reverend M. W. Maness. An educational building was envisioned. This building was constructed during the six year pastorate of the Reverend H. L. Hendricks, at a cost of approximately \$40,000.00. It was open for use in 1953. Soon after being appointed to Saint James in October 1954, the Reverend W. C. Wilson brought to the attention of the Official Board that 1955 would be the Church's Centennial Year, and recommended that plans be set in action for its proper observance. In the late spring of 1955, the pastor laid before the Official Board proposals which were adopted. November 20, 1955, was set as the date for the Commemoration. The following committees were set up and Chairmen appointed to make all arrangements:

Planning and Advisory Committee: Rev. W. C. Wilson, John J. Mason, J. W. Smoot, Sr., Charles Dandelake, Vernon L. Conyers, Mrs. Z. E. Brinson, Mrs. W. A. Mahler, Mrs. G. P. Miller.

H. I. Glass	1914-1918
D. E. Earnhardt	1918-1921
B. B. Slaughter	1921-1923
* R. C. Beaman	1923-1926
L. C. Larkin	1926-1929
* C. L. Read	1929-1930
W. C. Benson	1930-1932
J. V. Knight	1932-1934
R. W. Bradshaw	1934-1935
* E. H. McWhorter	1935-1936
H. G. Ruark	1936-1940
E. C. Durham	1940-1944
M. W. Maness	1944-1948
* H. L. Hendricks	1948-1954
W. C. Wilson	1954-1959
R. S. Brodie	1959-

\*deceased