

## Williston United Methodist Church History

Church history relates that the first effort of religious observance came when Joseph Piner, known as "Uncle Seph," invited a group to come to his home for worship around 1875. Uncle Seph was a Primitive Baptist, so these meetings were conducted along his belief.

Uncle Seph was the moving force to get a new school building in 1880, which, for several years, served a dual purpose. Itinerant preachers of any denomination were privileged to make use of the building.

One of the early preachers of the 1800's was a lovable old man and sincere preacher, "Uncle" Bembridge Hancock, who had charge of the Crow Hill and Williston areas. He was followed by the Rev. Daniel A. Walter, serving from 1880-82. Under his pastorate, a Sunday School was formed with Encrease Willis as Superintendent. Mr. Walter was followed by the Rev. Thomas J. Browning in 1882, serving for two years. During the time of his ministry, the "Springfield Methodist Episcopal Church" originated and plans began on the first house of worship.

One of the interesting sidelights concerning the building of the first church was the question of what denomination it would be. According to one source, a meeting of all the people in the community was called to decide if the new church would be Primitive Baptist or Methodist. A vote was taken and the Methodist won. The new church became a part of a group of Methodist churches known as The Core Sound Mission, which included all Methodist churches east of Beaufort.

At the first conference held in Williston in June 1883, the Rev. James E. Mann, presiding elder, was present. He presented the building project, putting a \$10 gold piece in the collection plate as a signal for the people to contribute all they could afford. Collections were made and with the aid of the extension board and donated labor, a house of worship was erected and in use by Christmas. The building was 45 x 30 feet, very plain, no bell, no steeple, two aisles with pews against the walls with a platform up front. The lumber for the church was milled in Harlowe by Rufus Bell. The land was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Louis L. Wade and the deed recorded in Book LL, page 552 in Beaufort. This building served the members for the next 27 years.

Two years after the church was built, Alonzo Willis asked Kate Willis Leffers if she would play the organ for services. She agreed, an organ was purchased, and the Springfield Methodist Episcopal Church had its first music in about 1885.

In 1905, Mr. Russell Piner became the moving force for having a Post Office located in this community. In order for this to occur, new boundaries and a name for the area had to be chosen, which would separate us from Smyrna. Mr. Piner submitted several names to the United States Postal Service, Williston was selected and the post office was set up.

A new church building was started in 1910, using some lumber from the old building, under the pastorate of Rev. W. E. Trotman, who served until 1912. He was followed by Rev. Nathan B. Strickland, who briefly served in 1912.

The new building was finished in 1913, and dedicated by Bishop McCoy during the pastorate of Rev. W. B. Humble. According to the late Rudolph Piner, Bishop McCoy preached from Colossians 1:18 using the text, "AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH."

Prior to the dedication service of 1913, all church members gathered at the end of Nassau Road and marched, youngest to oldest, to the church building. Lessie Piner Pake had fond memories of that day, as she remembered being a 10-year-old child taking part in the service. One memory was of a lawyer, Leslie Davis, of Beaufort, who presented special music. His solo was entitled, "BEAUTIFUL ISLE OF SOMEWHERE."

The steeple on the second church was 84 feet in height, making the church the tallest structure in the area. After lightning struck it in 1937, it was removed and replaced with a shorter steeple.

In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Churches North and South, and the Methodist Protestant Churches joined together as Methodists. Between 1939-40, this merger reached our community. In order to simplify matters as to Springfield and Williston, the church name emerged as Williston Methodist in the Williston community.

The last expansion program began in 1949, while Rev. Haywood Harrell was pastor, and continued through the pastorate of Rev. A.G. Reagan, 1951-52. The program included the complete renovation of the sanctuary, with the installation of new stained glass windows. Structural changes included the steeple being moved from side to center and the doors moved to a center position with windows on either side. The two-story Christian Education Building, consisting of eight classrooms, a large fellowship hall, a kitchen and two restrooms, were added adjacent to the back of the sanctuary. Total cost for improvements to the church was around \$15,000.00, and included many hours of free labor by the neighborhood men. The expansion program was completed in October 1956, while D. M. Tyson was pastor.

Rev. Tyson also has the distinction of being pastor when the eight room parsonage was built. The parsonage was necessary because in May 1955, the Williston-Smyrna Churches voted to be taken from the Straits Charge to form a new two-point Charge. In May 1955, Seymour Davis was contacted about the church buying a lot directly across from the church on which to build the parsonage. The downstairs of the parsonage was completed for livability in 1956. In May 1957, a telephone was installed. Rev. Tyson could be reached by dialing #651. He and his family resided in the parsonage until 1963.

With a newly completed expansion program and its own parsonage, the Williston Methodist Church saw its membership grow to 165, with 110 enrolled in Sunday School. The dedication service for the new education building was held in April 1958, with a picnic on the grounds.

In the 38 years since Rev. Tyson moved, Williston Methodists have carried on the work of their Lord with the help of 15 additional ministers. Spreading the WORD is a never-ending ministry carried on by each generation. May God continue to bless each one of us and all that we do in His name.