

## HISTORY OF BETHEL METHODIST CHURCH

Bolivia, N.C. *Brunswick Co. Wilmington, N. C.*

Who were the founders of Methodism in Bolivia? There is no record to give the names of persons who started Methodist Church services in Bolivia, North Carolina.

Bishop Francis Asbury organized Methodist Societies in Brunswick county in 1800 and 1801 and could have helped start our church. Methodism spread rapidly and by 1851 there were twelve Methodist churches in our area. These twelve churches made up the Brunswick Circuit (later called the Smithville Circuit). At that time the Brunswick Circuit was in the Camden District of the South Carolina Conference. The South Carolina Conference included all of South Carolina, Georgia and a considerable part of North Carolina. Local preachers, exhorters, and class leaders were chosen to help the preacher with his heavy load of work.

The first known location of a Methodist church in Bolivia was on the Phillip Cox place, and was called "Little Zora."

The next location of our church was at Gap Branch (Middle Swamp) near the James Harvell place. This was a log building and was called Zora. Here Christopher Columbus Mercer (Grandfather of Mrs. Olive DuRant Mercer) was the Sunday School leader. He also maintained a library for the church, sold religious books and was very active in other church work. At the conference in 1853, he was granted a license to preach. Some of the members of this church were Cox's Flower's, Harvells, McKees, McKeithans, Mercer's, Montgomery's Murrels, Sellers and others.

The congregation decided to build a new church at another location. The location of this building was at the Ross place (near the Roscoe Mintz place). The name of the new church was "BETHEL". The land for this church was deeded to the trustees of Bethel Church Oct. 22, 1907 by Alex Robinson and his wife Fannie Robinson. The trustees were James H. Knox, John F. Mercer, William Eichorn and James M. Harvell. Deed was notarized by J.P. Cox.

Edward Mercer, William Mercer, George Murrell, Duncan Harvell, Jim Harvell, Thomas McKeithan and others helped build this church. It was a large one room building, well finished with glass windows and white plastered inside walls. The ceiling and floor were of planed boards, but were not tongue and groove. The roof and outside walls were of hand hewn cypress shingles. There were two front doors and two aisles. A row of long pews was down the center of the building and a row of short pews was down each side. Small oil lamps were mounted on the brown window facings and a large lamp was in the center on a post. There was no musical instrument in the church. The regular "preaching Sunday" was the second Sunday of each month. At the services, the men would sit on the right side of the church and the ladies would sit on the left. Sunday School had to close during the winter months because there were no heating facilities. A member of this church, D.A. Fattrell, became a preacher and a member of the Methodist Conference. The Cox's, Flowers, Harvells, Knox's, McKeithans Mercer's, Rosses, Sellers, Skippers and others were members of this church. Services were held in this building until about 1916.

The congregation again decided to build a new building near the center of the area served by the church. On April 29, 1916 A.L. Mercer and his wife M.D. Mercer gave to Bethel Church 1.22 acres of land as a site for a new church building. This property



was on the Wilmington road, near the Edwards place in Bolivia (across the road from the W.K.Cox home). The Trustees at that time were A.M. Moore, W.E.Eichorn and T.J.Mercer. This deed was notarized by W.O. McKeithan, Justice of the Peace of Brunswick County. Services were held in this church building for the first time the latter part of 1916. Rev. W.R.Royal was the pastor and worked very hard to get this building finished. This was a one room building with a shingle roof and weather boarded walls. Mrs. Mattie Cox Lewis, the first church organist, loaned a reed organ to furnish music for the services. Mrs Geneva Cox Jones was the assistant organist. The Church Library was still maintained. Services were held in this building until it was wrecked by a storm in 1917. This piece of land was sold to Mr.J.A. Willetts for the sum of one hundred and fifty six dollars.

F.E.Galloway and wife Annie Haultsby Galloway, gave our present lot to Bethel, on March 8, 1918. Trustees were T.J.Mercer, W.E.Eichorn A.M.Moore and their successors. Recorded in Book 29 page 289. Walter Leonard, Notary Public.

While our present building was under construction, the Holiness and Baptist churches opened their doors to our congregation and very few services were missed. The members donated labor and material and were able to enclose the building so services could be held in 1919. F.E.Galloway, Lester Edwards and W.O.McKeithan contracted the building. W.O.McKeithan made the altar rail and fixed the windows. The steeple with the bell was the first in any of the Methodist churches in Bolivia. The organ from the wrecked church was used until a piano could be purchased. Mrs. Frances Lewis Dixon made a very nice straw collection plateto be used. D.A.Watkins was pastor at the time this building was completed. The building was insured for \$1000.00 in March, 1920 at a cost of \$8.60. The Sunday School rooms were added in 1937. Rev. W.J.Freeman was pastor at that time and worked very hard to get them finished. Timber was given by Tharps, Danfords, Knoxs and others and everyone joined together in doing the work. Guilbert and Hazel Cox was the first couple married in this building.

Bethel at this time was on the Town Creek Charge, and there were four churches on this charge. They were Bethel, Pincy Grove, Shiloh and Zion. Our parsonage was at Zion near Town Creek.

Rev. Walter Pavy, a native of England, came to our charge in 1940. He held services in all of the four churches on the charge, had a radio program in Wilmington, North Carolina, did much work with the young people and stirred all of the people to more active service. He conducted religious services regularly at the Bolivia School and died on his way to conduct one of these services, in 1943. He was truly a "circuit rider"-not on horse back, but on his bicycle, which he rode to hold most of his services.

Much progress was made by our church under the ministry of Rev. Russell H. Caudill. Many new members were added and repairs were made to the church and parsonage at Town Creek. He served our charge from 1948 through 1951. A new Baldwin electric organ was purchased for the church in 1954 while Rev. C.L. Warren was pastor.

Bethel became a Station church in February 1958. Dr. J.E. Garlington, District Superintendent, had the opportunity to secure an additional minister for the Wilmington District. At this time Rev. Alden Hemingway was serving as pastor of the Town Creek charge and was asked to finish out the year at Bethel. At annual conference in 1958 Rev. Hemingway was appointed to ~~serve~~ serve Bolivia, Bethel Charge, for the coming year. Since we now had a full time pastor it was necessary to build a parsonage. The land for the parsonage was deeded to the trustees of Bethel Methodist Church, Bolivia, N.C. by R.K. McKeithan and his wife Evelyn McKeithan on Nov. 13, 1958. Trustees were D.L. Mercer, E.C. Eichorn and J.M. Danford. Notarized by Warren Sellers.



Mr. Troy Henry gave the use of his home in Bolivia (across from Bolivia High School) for a parsonage until the new one was completed. On October 26th 1958, the Ground Breaking Ceremony was held for the new parsonage. (Our Homecoming was held the same day) and W.K.Cox dug the first shovel of earth. On February 10th 1959 work was actually begun on the foundation of the building. A large part of the timber was donated by members of the church and some of the men, along with Rev. Hemingway, cut the trees and sawed the lumber. Much of the material and labor was donated by members and non-members of the church, but it was necessary to secure a loan of \$3500.00 from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church for a period of ten years. By the end of June 1959 the outside of the building was completed and some of the inside work was done.

Mrs. Edna Maultsby Gaskill and Mr. Marshall Frink were married by Rev. Hemingway in the temporary parsonage on May 6th 1959.

At annual conference of June 1959, Rev. Jack Fulghum was sent to this charge. Troy Henry's house was still being used as the parsonage. Rev. Fulghum moved into the new parsonage on November 28th 1959, and lived there until annual conference.

Malcolm Knox and Judy Maultsby were the first couple married in the new parsonage. They were married by Rev. Fulghum.

Rev. Kermit Norris was sent to Bethel in June 1960 and served for one year.

Rev. H.K.Jeanneret was pastor at Bethel from July 1961 until June 1963. During his two years here a new roof was put on the church at a cost of \$615.00, also the inside of the church was remodeled, the floors were finished and new lights were installed in the sanctuary (the lights were given by the Jeanneret family.)

It was at the annual conference of June 1961 that Bethel at Bolivia, N.C. and Concord at Supply, N.C. came together as the Bethel-Concord charge. Rev. Jeanneret served both of these churches.

At Annual Conference in June 1963, Rev. James A. Starnes was assigned to the Bethel-Concord charge. He was still in Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia so Rev. J.M. Carroll (retired) served in his place until March 1964. Rev. Starnes came in March 1964 and served until June 1965. He was well liked by all and everyone enjoyed his radio program, "This Day With God" on the Shallotte Radio Station. He also had an article each week in The Brunswick Beacon. Plans were made to repair the outside of the church and some work had been done before conference.

At annual conference in June 1965, Rev. J.P. Pegg was sent to this charge. Repair work was finished and the church was painted on the outside in December, 1965. Rev. Pegg visited each member of the church living in the community regularly.

In June 1967 Rev. J.C. Dunn came to our charge and served for five years. He was well liked by all but was unable to move in our parsonage and live in the community, because he was also Director of The Good Sheperd Home at Lake Waccamaw, N.C. and had a great responsibility there. Much was accomplished during his five year stay. With his help and supervision and labor from the men at the Good Sheperd Home, a new altar was built and all the pews refinished. The sanctuary was painted and a new heating and air conditioning system was installed.

When Mrs. Minnie Wilson died she left some money to be used for the church, the church members added to it and purchased new pulpit furniture. Our new collection plates were given in memory of Royal Danford, by Regan Construction Co. of Wilmington, N.C.

Rev. E.R. Schuller came to our charge in June 1972, and served for one year. He was retired and lived at Youpon Beach. Being so near his work he preferred to live in his own home, so our parsonage was still



rented to the principal of Bolivia School. While serving our church Rev. Schuller taught a preparatory membership class and received seven young people into the church. Money was raised to buy the cross and candlesticks for the altar.

Rev. T.H. House came to serve our charge in June 1973 as a part time minister. He was living in Southport, n.C. at this time and was recovering from a heart attack. It can hardly be said that he was a part time minister as he never missed a service, visited in the community every week, attended all meetings and was always ready to help when needed. He was appointed full time minister at the 1974 conference. He and his wife Mary Etta are living in our parsonage now, and it is good to have a methodist minister living in Bolivia after seven years without one.

With God working through the United Methodist Women and the help of Rev. and Mrs. House the parsonage was completely redecorated inside.

Much preparation was made for our 1974 spring revival. The church was painted on the outside and some work done inside. A religious census was taken in the community. Rev. John T. Maides (brother of Mrs. R.T. Mercer) was the evangelist. The services were well attended by many of the churches in our area. We are beginning our new year 1975, much has already been accomplished, many projects started, and with the help of God, the pastor and each member, we are looking forward to a great year.