

# History of the Bethel United Methodist Church

1831-1995

October 08, 1995

## Early Methodism in Granville County

The circuit riders of early Methodism came into Granville County soon after the first Methodist sermon was preached in the colony of North Carolina. Joseph Pilmoor was the first Methodist preacher sent out by John Wesley to enter North Carolina and to him goes the honor of having preached the first Methodist sermon in the colony. This took place on September 28, 1772, at Currituck Courthouse in Currituck County.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Williams was the second Methodist preacher to enter North Carolina and it is believed that he was the first to enter Granville County. Williams landed in New York in 1769, helped Philip Embury some at Wesley Chapel in New York City and then made his way southward. He came to Maryland where he assisted Robert Strawbridge for a time, then pushed on into Virginia and was the first to introduce Methodism in Virginia. It should also be noted that Williams began the first publishing venture by a Methodist preacher by distributing tracts attributed to John Wesley. Williams was forbidden to continue this practice at the 1773 Conference quite possibly because he had married and become a "local preacher" rather than remaining single and "itinerating."<sup>2</sup>

Jesse Lee, an early Methodist historian wrote, "In the beginning of this year (1774) Robert Williams began to form societies in Virginia...Soon after he began to preach through the country from Petersburg into the North part of North Carolina, and the fruits of his labours began to appear, and souls were awakened and brought to the knowledge of God." The Carolina Circuit was formed at the Fourth General Conference held in Baltimore on May 21, 1776. This circuit included all the territory of North Carolina and was served by three preachers: Edward Dromgoole, Francis Poythress and Isham Tatum. The Sixth General Conference, held in Leesburg Virginia on May 19, 1778, brought forth three circuits from the Carolina Circuit which were called: Roanoke (for Roanoke Rapids) Circuit, Tar River Circuit and New Hope Circuit.<sup>3</sup>

Methodism in Granville County, much like Methodism through much of America at that time, found its beginnings in the homes of dedicated lay people. Granville County Methodism found its home in the house of George Harris sometime between 1776 and 1778. A church building was eventually erected for the conference and was named "Harris Meeting House" and was the first Methodist Church ever built in Granville County. As is true with much of history, the first date of services at this church is unknown but it is known that a Methodist preacher, Micajah Debruler from Maryland, witnessed the marriage of Ann Hicks and William Matthews on July 12, 1778. Debruler was one of two circuit riders stationed on the Tar River Circuit. The other preacher assigned to this circuit, Adam Cloud, married a Granville County resident, Miss Mary Hicks, daughter of William Hicks, in 1782 and lived on land adjoining the Harris Meeting House. The Harris Meeting House continued to serve the needs of Granville County Methodists until 1828 when the church was disbanded and Salem Methodist Episcopal and Rehoboth Protestant Methodist Churches were formed. Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church was also a daughter of the Harris Meeting House.

Both early Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, were known to have traveled and preached in Granville County from the years 1780 to 1785.

### Bethel United Methodist Church<sup>1</sup>

From its beginning in 1831 the congregation of Bethel UMC has been dedicated to the Methodist movement. We are the heirs of the ages, deeply indebted to the men and women of vision who have given of their time, their earnings, their talents, and themselves. We dedicate this tribute and history to the founders and promoters of Bethel United Methodist Church and hold fast to the legacy that they have passed on to us.

Bethel, as mentioned above, is a daughter of "Harris Meeting House" and was organized in 1831. For the past one hundred and sixty-four years this congregation has gathered together to worship and find strength to live and witness in this community. Rural and farm people have gather here Sunday after Sunday with grateful hearts thanking God for the blessings of the past and asking for God's guiding hand to lead them through the times ahead.

Little is known about the actual organization of the original congregation in 1831. The first church building was located on the opposite side of the old county road from which the present old building now stands. It was later torn down and rebuilt where the present cemetery is. During the pastorate of Rev. Albert S. Barnes, 1908-10, it was again torn down and the third and present old church building was erected, facing the new and present roadway. Before the second building was torn down it faced south with two doors, one for men and one for women, and two aisles, on each side. Men normally sat on one side and the women on the other. African Americans were regular worshipers in this building. Aunt Jennie Hamme was known for her sincere "Amen's."

Some of the charter members for this Methodist meeting house were Hights, Bobbitts, Burvells and Kittrells.

The greatest revival this congregation has ever experienced was in 1867. Another significant revival, which cannot even be remembered by our oldest members, was held about the turn of the century when three ministers were participating. In 1904, Rev. W. H. Puckett reported to the fourth Quarterly Conference at Salem Methodist Church that "There has been a decided improvement in the spiritual state of the church during the quarter. We have held five meetings in which the Lord was graciously present, convicting sinners, converting mourners, reclaiming backsliders and reviving church members."

Like all other churches the spiritual state of Bethel United Methodist Church has been up and down. Many can remember Mr. C. A. Hicks telling the story of one of the ministers remarking during difficult financial times that "if you don't pay me I am going to send the sheriff down." Whether or not this would have ever happened is not known but it does testify to the fact that this congregation has passed through some difficult days in the past.

Many still wonder about the history of our present sanctuary and often times share stories about its construction. In 1952 a building committee consisting of A. S. May (chairman), North E. Dement, C. A. Hicks, Luther VanDyke, Mrs. T. M. Dickerson and Mrs. A. F. Dickerson, was elected but remained inactive for three years. In 1955 the pastor, Garry Shelton, found that the church was ready and willing to act on a new

building so a "church conference" was called and it was voted to begin building in January of 1957. The first money for this project came from the offerings taken at a revival meeting in July 1955. Rev. Vernon Tyson, who was the visiting minister, gave his time in order that all proceeds go for the new proposed building. The congregation pulled together in cultivating and selling an acre of tobacco from land donated by a member in order to raise further funds. This plan, known as the "Lord's Acre" pulled the congregation together for excellent fellowship in 1955-56. Pledges were also made during 1955-56. At the Homecoming forty years ago (1955) the 101 members raised \$2,200.00.

Early in 1956 logs were cut and sawed from the farms of C. A. Hicks, Hugh Breedlove, Jack Dickerson, Mrs. A. F. Dickerson, Mrs. Beulah Davis, N. E. Dement, W. G. Dement, Graham Bradford, Luther VanDyke and Herbert Daniel.

On a cold day in January 1957, the foundation was laid off and work immediately followed. Hr. Howard Dickerson was the only carpenter hired. All other work was done by the members themselves. The four church school rooms, a library, and two rest rooms were painted by the women of the church.

Easter Sunday of 1957 was set for opening day. It was necessary to work long into the night for many nights, but on Easter Sunday, 1957, Dr. C. D. Barclift, District Superintendent of the Durham District and Dr. Arthur Kale, Professor at Duke Divinity School were on hand for the first service to be held in the beautiful \$45,000 structure. A new Baldwin organ was purchased just one week before opening day, and it added much to the beauty and experience of the worship service. Pictures of this day still hang on the walls of our old church building and are reminders to us of all Bethel has done in the past.

New furniture, built by Dorsey Dement, for the chancel area was given by Mrs. A. F. Dickerson. Pews were given by Mr. and Mrs. Johnnie Clayton, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Breedlove, Mr. and Mrs. Osborn Harris, Jeannette, Hamp and Frances Longmire, Mrs. Luther VanDyke, Randolph Wilson, J. T. Shotwell, Phelps family, Beulah Davis family Betty Lou Blackwell and C. A. Hicks. Stained glass windows were given by E. T. Jones family, J. H. Dickerson family, Mrs. C. R. Dickerson and daughter, C.A. Hicks and family, the families of H. H. and H. A. Hicks, Walter Dickerson, William Bradford, Albert Hicks and T. E. Dement. The cross and candle sticks were given by the family of Mrs. Lillie Davis Wilson and have recently been treated to prevent further tarnish. Shrubs were presented by W. T. Yancey of Blalock Chevrolet Company. Elbert Dement of Hampton, VA, with the aid of members of the church did the electrical work at cost with all labor donated. Mr. Tom Johnson of the Oxford Public Ledger has been most helpful. Other donations from people outside the congregation, too numerous to mention, have gone a long way toward making this building possible.

The continued upkeep of this building has been the concern of the congregation for quite some time but they have always remained faithful. In 1995, new windows were installed on the Sunday School portion of the building. Offerings were received from the congregation for this project.

### **The Future of Bethel United Methodist Church**

As we look back on the history of this congregation we are forced to reflect on where we are headed for the future. Many faithful people have worship together in the congregation known as Bethel. We have experienced both good times and bad as a

congregation. Through it all, however, God has been present to strengthen and lead us. When we take steps leading into tomorrow we know that God will remain with us and can rest on the certainty of God's steadfast grace.

By Pauline (Dickerson) Harris,  
Rev. Garry Shelton  
and Rev. Scott Sears

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this essay is attributed to Claude A. Renn in "History of Shady Grove Methodist Church," published by Renn in 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, Abingdon Press, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Renn

<sup>4</sup> Much of this section of our history comes from the history written by Rev. Shelton for the dedication of this building on May 4, 1958.

PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED ON THE GRANVILLE CIRCUIT of  
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1831	George Dye & James Jameson	1900-03	J. D. Pegram
1832	William Holms & James Jameson	1904-07	W. H. Pucket
1883	Benjamin Kidd	1908-10	A. S. Barnes
1884	Robert O. Burton	1911-1914	L. H. Joyner
1835-36	H. T. Weatherly	1915-16	C. A. Jones
1837	H. Speck	1917-20	B. C. Thompson
1838-39	J. Goodman & R. C. Maynard	1921-23	B. H. Black
1840	D. B. Nicholson	1924-25	N. B. Strickland
1841-42	H. G. Leigh	1926-28	J. H. Lanning
1843	W. Compton	1929-31	B. D. Critcher
1844	J. Tillett	1932-34	P. H. Fields
1844-52	No record--Division of church	1935-37	T. S. Richmond
1852	J. P. Moore	1938	J. F. Stames
1853-55	A. Norman	1939-41	L. C. Brothers
1856	J. D. Halstead	1941-48	J. L. Smith
1857	P. H. Joyner & M. J. Hunt	1949-51	R. I. Epps
1858	J. W. Floyd	1952	J. R. Regan
1859	J. P. Moore	1953-54	J. L. Beaty
1860	W. Harris	1954-58	G. J. Shelton
1861	T. W. Moore	1958-60	R. Randolph
1862	W. S. Chaffin & J. W. Floyd	1960-63	B. Bass
1863	W. C. Gannon	1963-66	S. Latorre
1864	Supplied by Riders	1966-67	L. Buzzard
1865	W. C. Gannon	1967-68	J. Coyle
1866	No minutes	1968-69	L. H. Turner, Jr.
1867-69	J. Tillett	1969-70	E. C. Crawford
1870-71	A. D. Betts	1970-73	Joe Forbes
1872	W. C. Gannon	1973-75	D. R. Dowling
1873-75	J. R. Griffith	1975-78	R. L. Thompson
1876	S. V. Hoyle	1978-80	Steve Porter
1877-80	J. T. Gibbs	1980-84	William Townsend
1881-83	L. H. Gibbons	1984-89	Brian Wingo
1884	J. T. Bibbs	1989-90	James King
1885	T. A. Boone	1990-93	Tryon Lowry
1886-88	N. E. Coltrane	1993-96	Scott Sears
1889-92	J. H. Hall	1996-98	Lily Chou
1893-94	P. L. Herman	1998-	Carolyn Kyle Sims
1895-96	G. B. Perry		
1897-99	K. D. Holmes		