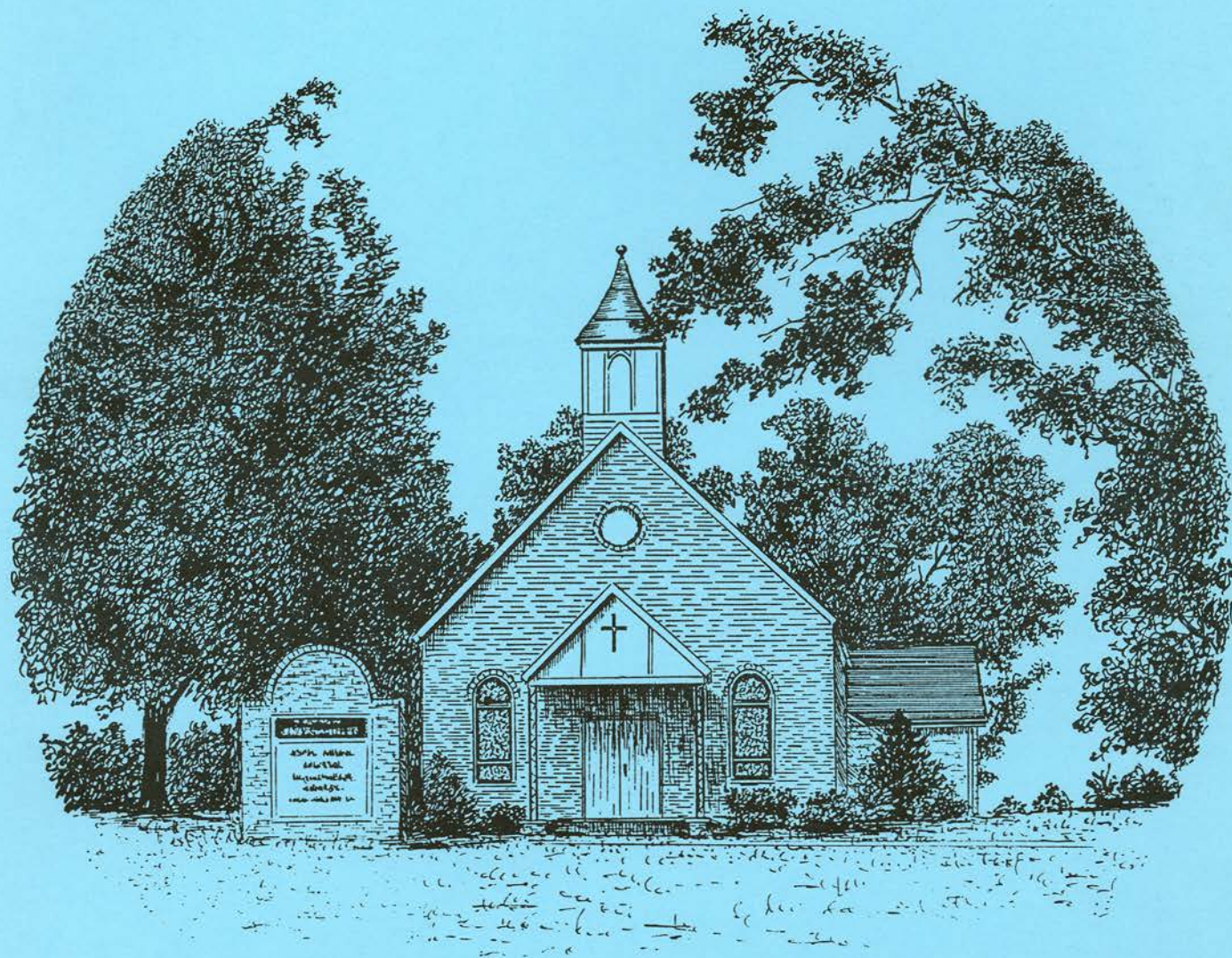


**Bethlehem
United Methodist Church
1791 - 1991**



Arcola, North Carolina

Acknowledgments

The first history of Bethlehem was written by the Vacation Bible School youth class of 1951. Rev. William Wells was pastor, The youth class was taught by Mr. Joseph Moore of Duke Divinity School, and one of their projects was to write the history of Bethlehem. J.P. Harris and Anton Reid were two members of the class. They obtained information from Miss Elizabeth Davis, Mr. Walter Conn, Mrs. J.F. Hunter, Mrs. Beaufort D. Scull, Mr. J.P. Harris, and from old records of the church and the charge.

The members of Bethlehem United Methodist Church are most grateful to Mrs. Lula Hunter Skillman and her late husband, Mr. Clarence E. Skillman for their tireless work in researching, compiling and preserving our heritage in The Story of Arcola, published in 1984, which adds much additional information to the original history mentioned above. With her permission, Chapter Six of that publication is being used to prepare this account of days gone by, but not forgotten.

Bicentennial Committee

Lillie G. Shearin, Chairman
Mary P. Callahan
Betty Jean Capps
Clinton Capps
Jane E. Fleming
Lorraine D. Porter
Rev. Timothy Hackett, Pastor

Compiled by:
Lorraine D. Porter
1991

THE HISTORY

of

BETHLEHEM

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ARCOLA, NORTH CAROLINA

1791 - 1991

"Miss Marian Boyd found in the files of Dr. Lena Hawks the record of a deed dated 1791, from William Burt 'A certain parcel of land, having on it a meeting house...to the church and its successors forever.' Witness, William Arrington. (B. 12, p. 6)"

Lula Hunter Skillman

200 years ago is a long time. Our nation was still a teenager, a young man by the name of George Washington was entering his third year as our president, and somewhere on " a certain parcel of land", we had our beginning as Bethlehem United Methodist Church. Two centuries, ten score, or twenty decades, no matter how you categorized it, celebrating a bicentennial is something special.

Bethlehem from its beginnings in 1791 has been able to provide many, wonderful, spiritual and personal moments to all those who have gathered to worship together. Somewhere wedged between the 10,500 sermons preached by over 70 pastors, we have all established friendships that will remain with us regardless of where we live, our age, or even when our friends go on to be with our Lord.

This morning I will deliver sermon #10,501 as your 71st pastor. Though I am excited and honored to have such a task ahead of me, the real joy I look forward to is seeing the reunited friendships and rekindled relationships that are the real reason we are gathered here this morning.

200 years ago is quite a long time. In 1791, they gathered in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This morning in 1991, we gather in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow it does not seem that long ago.

In His Name,



Rev. Timm Hackett

Bethlehem United Methodist Church History

1791-1991

In the early days of Methodism, the people living near the line between Warren and Halifax Counties built a double log church near the place now known as the Henry Shearin place, west of Essex.

The church was known as "Marshall Chapel" and belonged to the Halifax Circuit of the North Carolina Conference. Later, this church was disposed of, and a plank church was built at the place now called "Old Bethlehem". Sometimes before the War Between the States, the name of the church was changed to Bethlehem.

The materials used in the building were of the very best, of solid lightwood (heart pine) in every place. The corner posts were all in one solid piece, hollowed out in a trough, shaped and held in place by lightwood pegs. The framework was extra large; the pegs were large and protruded inside the church, with their sharp points in plain view. The extra heavy pieces overhead were bound together where joined with wide shop-made bands. Even the floor was heavy lightwood, hand-sawed.

Sometimes along the way the preacher, Rev. T. B. Kingsbury, and Mr. Jack Burgess had trouble. Burgess told the preacher that if he ever came back he would kill him. Records show that Kingsbury was appointed in 1865 and stayed six months.

After the war the church was placed on the Warrenton Circuit. Between 1869 and 1871, each Sunday that was warm enough, George W. Davis met with the older children and held a Sunday school. Each child had only a New Testament. From their Testaments they were taught to read, write and spell. The children sat on the floor, placing their slates or paper on the bench. That was the only formal education many of them had. Miss Elizabeth Davis says, "Mrs. Fannie Hancock Motley told me after she was married and had a family, of never having any other schooling in all her life."

In August 1883, the Warrenton Circuit and one other were made into two circuits. Warrenton Circuit on the north had five churches. Warren Circuit on the south had seven: Shocco, Sarepta, Cokesbury, Bethlehem, Prospect, Shady Grove, and Providence. The parsonage on North Main Street in Warrenton was sold and the pastor, Rev. J. W. Jenkins, lived in a rented house while the Warren Circuit parsonage was being built. Rev. Jenkins moved into the completed home in 1888. The final report given in 1890 showed the total cost to be \$1,168.98.

THE MOVE TO ARCOLA - 1892

In August 1892, the pastor, Rev. Charles Durant, announced one Sunday that he would be there Monday morning with his hammer, and for the congregation to meet him with hammers and wagons for the purpose of moving the church to Arcola, where a Sunday school was being held.

J. T. Gupton said, "I was a good sized boy at the time, and I well remember how the church was moved. I know my father and Mr. Jim Rooker were among those who came with their tools to tear down the old building. Mrs. Burt, Mr. Willis Tharrington, and Mr. George Davis sent their wagons and drivers to move everything that could be used or sold. Some of the stuff was left on the spot. They had to buy materials for weatherboarding, ceiling, and wainscoting. I know Mr. Willis Tharrington was the contractor, and the carpenters were Bruce Allen, Willard Sledge, Junius Burgess, Stephen Williams, and Haywood For several years they used a home-made pulpit."

The foundations were laid before this deed was drawn up: "Sept. 27, 1892...George W. Davis to Clecy Tharrington, Willis Tharrington, and G. W. Davis, trustees, for \$1.00...containing 24/25 of an acre." (B.58, p.431) George W. Davis, chairman of the building committee, kept a complete record in his store journals for every nail, the three window panes that were broken in moving, every board, and the paint, also payments to all the workmen. After subtracting the profits from sale of the lot and all materials not used, the total cost was \$361.05.

Services were held that winter though the interior had not been finished. December 26, 1892, the people had a Christmas tree in the church - a tree that reached to the ceiling. The custom was continued for many years.

Nowadays, the tree is not so tall, but is decorated with Chrismons made by Bethlehem United Methodist Women. In recent years the tree has been given to honor or as a memorial to members. In 1984, after the Christmas program ended, the late Clarence Skillman, was surprised with a birthday party honoring his ninetieth birthday.

On December 26, 1893, an entertainment was given on a platform built for that purpose in the front of the church. After the program, as Mattie Davis played the wedding march, Bettie Tharrington and J. W. Cook came up the aisle, mounted the steps to the platform, and were united in marriage by the Rev. C. O. Durant. This was the first marriage in the new church.

Through the four years of building (1892-1896), members and friends made contributions to the building fund. The church was painted again in 1916.

During revivals, which were always held the third week in August "after the crops were laid by", buggies and wagons could be seen tied to the trees all around the grounds. After the morning service, all were invited to dinner served from a long table under the trees on the north side. This table was spread from end to end with good food from the baskets brought by the ladies. (One year it poured rain all the week.) Between services, the young people could be seen going back and forth to the old well. With the coming of automobiles and electric lights, this custom gave way to evening services.

Rev .Charles B. Jones, 1917-1919, was the first preacher to have a car. Before that, the preacher had driven his horse and buggy out from town on Saturday to spend the night. George Hunter said, "Grandpa (George Davis) was conducting Sunday school when the first automobile came through Arcola in 1909. It broke up Sunday school as everybody rushed to see the strange contraption." Lights came much later; in 1942 N.W. Grant reported that Bethlehem had been wired.

CHURCH REMODELED

The Sunday school assembled in the front of the one room church, which was heated with a wood heater about midway on one side, and cooled by breezes through large windows on all four sides. In each corner classes met behind burlap curtains held up by rods. The attendance was fifty-two the day a picture was made in 1915. It was the dream of some teachers to have Sunday school rooms added.

During the morning services of an all-day meeting in 1948 the Rev. F. B. Brandenburg (1945-1950) made a forceful appeal for better facilities for the children. He challenged the congregation to a building program.

As the people filed slowly out of the church and made their way to the table, snatches of conversation were heard, "Mr. Brandenburg stepped on our toes, but he is right." "We must do it. We can't go on like this, with each class trying to out shout the others." "Maybe we need more faith. With faith and work we can do it."

The preacher appointed a finance-building committee: J. R. King, Sr., Robert H. Arrington, and Amos L. Capps. Amos Capps, with a reputation for getting things done, was named chairman. Their first move was to secure the services of Mr. Stuart Davis of Louisburg as architect. There had been some talk about tearing down the building and having plans drawn for a new modern building. After making a thorough examination of the building: the inside construction, the foundation, the huge timbers of heart pine brought from Bethlehem, he reported: "The present building is better than anything you can build today."

At this point, Mr. King and Mr. Arrington said, "Amos, you go ahead and build the church and we'll back you up." And Amos did, giving freely and generously of his time, means, business ability, and the employees and equipment of his own business.

Clarence Davis was building contractor, and Frank Barlow was wiring contractor. The preacher spent much of the time watching and encouraging the work. The committee kept busy soliciting funds. Contributions came from members, former members, and friends.

The building was completed in 1949, at a total cost of \$12,000, part of which came from the Duke Endowment Fund. As it stood then, the sanctuary was the original building, with brick outer walls and remodeled interior. The front doors and ten beautiful stained glass windows were memorials to faithful members, as were the pews, the pulpit Bible and other furnishings. The educational department across the west side was entirely new and of brick construction.

Rev. Brandenburg invited a friend, Rev. J. F. Herbert, to conduct the service of dedication on a Sunday in 1949. During the pastorate of Rev. Wayne Ebert plexiglass covering was installed to protect our beautiful stained-glass windows. In this endeavor, as in others, members and friends were generous with contributions.

Gas heating service replaced the oil floor furnace in 1957. Central heating and air conditioning were installed in 1982. Unfortunately, this unit had to be renewed in 1989. It was comfortable for services on Dec. 25, 1983, though the temperature was six degrees outside.

In 1950 Sarepta was closed and the proceeds was divided among the other churches on the circuit. The North Carolina Conference of 1958 recommended that the large circuits be divided so that every church might hold services every Sunday. Accordingly, the Warren Circuit was divided to form the Bethlehem-Shady Grove Charge; and the Warren Charge with Providence, Prospect, and Shocco. Rev. Merle Amspacker was assigned to the newly formed charge.

This change meant the building of another parsonage. It was decided to build it at Inez across from Shady Grove Church on an acre lot given by J.T. and Kate Harris. It was decided that Shady Grove would be responsible for the construction of the building, including the heating system and built-in stove. Bethlehem would be responsible for the furnishings. Everyone went to work on the big project.

Bethlehem appointed the following committees: Fund raising committee, George W. Davis, Mrs. Melvin Shearin, and Mrs. R.L. Capps; Furniture committee, Mrs. C.E. Harris, Mrs. Robert Conn (now Mrs. George Hunter), and Sam King; Other Committees, R.H. Arrington, Amos Capps, and Mrs. Bessie Gupton. You can read more about these activities and the hard work done in Mrs. Skillman's The Story of Arcola on page 51.

Three persons have gone from Bethlehem into full-time church work. Sam Drake went to Texas in 1890, and from there into the Methodist ministry.

In 1899, Miss Elizabeth R. Davis went to Scarritt Bible and Training School in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated in 1902 in the first class of deaconesses.

Mrs. Joyce D. Odom was appointed student pastor to Micro-Fellowship Charge in June of 1990. In May of 1991 she graduated from Wesleyan College with honors and is now continuing her education at Duke University.

At least one former member has become a preachers wife. In 1944, Helen Hunter and Rev. R. Stewart Brodie were married. He was buried in our cemetery in November of 1983. Their daughter, Betsy, is also a minister's wife. She is married to Rev. Fred Roberts.

MEMORIAL DAY

In the old days, it was the custom to bury the body the day after death, but have a minister preach the funeral whenever it might be convenient. Little Willis Odom died during conference in December 1912. The following spring, the family asked the new minister, Rev. Robert W. Bailey, to preach his funeral. He suggested that the church clean up the cemetery and have a memorial service for all who had been buried there. With enthusiasm, everybody went to work, and each family cleared its own square.

Mrs. Beaufort Scull arranged the program, practiced special music and helped the young people decorate the church on Saturday. Sunday morning the children of the church, from three to sixteen years, formed a line from the church door almost to the road. The boys were in their best, the girls in white dresses and each clasp a bunch of flowers. As the piano began "Onward Christian Soldiers", the children marched to the front seats.

Mrs. Scull read a paper she had prepared: " Twenty years ago our cemetery was a beautiful grove where children played games and built playhouses. At the request of Mrs. Eliza Arrington that she be buried near the church of which she was a faithful member, it was decided that a cemetery should be added to the church property. The first to be buried there was Robert Tharrington, son of Robert and Mollie Tharrington. Mrs. Arrington died in 1894 and was the second to be placed there..." The paper continued with a short tribute to each one buried there. The complete paper was published in the "Warren Record" of August 1913. It has been preserved in Mrs. Hunter's scrapbook. At the close of the service, the children marched out to the cemetery and placed flowers on each grave.

Over the years the program has changed, but the spirit of remembering our loved ones has not. Many, many "folks" come home each year for Memorial Day at Bethlehem - always the fourth Sunday of May, at 3:00 P.M. The offering is used for the upkeep of the cemetery. Several families have given trust funds to the cemetery and memorials of cash are donated.

"In 1906 George W. Davis and wife Rebecca on this the 19th day of May, 1906, to John W. Gupton, Thomas C. Williams, Edward D. Conn, John R. King, and Weldon T. Davis, trustees, for the sum of \$1.00... adjoining the lands of Bethlehem Church...1 acre to be used as a church cemetery. Lots to be sold for not less than \$5.00 and not more than \$15.00." (B. 72, p. 561)

"This deed made the 24th day of April, 1972, by Weldon T. Davis and his wife Tommie Davis...parties of the first part, and G.W. Davis, S.T. King and, H.B. King, trustees...parties of the second part...for one dollar (\$1.00...and the affection of parties of the first part for Bethlehem Methodist Church...have sold to parties of the second part...a tract bounded as follows:" (B. 249, 821) This tract was added to the cemetery on the east side.

"This deed, made this 23rd day of December, 1986, by George W. Davis...party of the first part, to Harvy B. King, Alberta S. Harris, and George W. Davis, Trustees of Bethlehem United Methodist Church...parties of the second part,...for...ONE DOLLAR (\$1.00)... and...love...for Bethlehem...the following described land... (B. 442, p. 305) This tract includes the area where the Arcola School was located until 1987 when it was torn down and replaced with a parking area.

Chairman of the cemetery committee, W. Clinton Capps, has identified most of the grave sights, but needs help in identifying some of the older graves.

MINISTERS

- 1863 -- Lenmom Shell.
- 1865 -- T.B. Kingsbury.
- 1866 -- J.B. Moore.
- 1870 -- R.A. Willis. Prominent N.C. preacher; son was a minister, daughter taught at Littleton college.
- 1874 -- S.V. Hoyle.
- 1876 -- J.R. Griffith.
- 1880 -- W.C. Gannon.
- 1881 -- J.R. Griffith. Only one to serve twice.
- 1883 -- J.W. Holden. Circuit divided (7 churches on Warren Circuit).
- 1886 -- W.B. North.
- 1887 -- John W. Jenkins. The first superintendent of The Methodist Home for Children, which was chartered in 1899.
- 1889 -- B.B. Culbreath.
- 1892 -- C.O. Durant. Church moved to Arcola from Bethlehem.
- 1894 -- T.J. Dailey.
- 1897 -- John Sanford. Salary \$800.
- 1899 -- J.M. Rice.
- 1901 -- R.B. Clark.
- 1902 -- S.T. Moyle.
- 1903 -- L.M. Chaffin.
- 1904 -- B.C. Allred.
- 1908 -- B.C. Thompson.
- 1912 -- Robert W. Bailey. Began Memorial Day.
- 1916 -- M.Y. Self.
- 1917 -- C.B. Jones. The first preacher to have a car.
- 1919 -- Jesse Draper.
- 1923 -- William Towe. Had a singing school.
- 1927 -- S.E. Wright. Died Feb. 27, 1932.
- 1932 -- E.N. Harrison.
- 1934 -- L.C. Brothers.
- 1938 -- E.R. Shuller.
- 1941 -- N.W. Grant.
- 1945 -- F.B. Brandenburg. Led in remodeling the church.
- 1950 -- W.M. Wells
- 1953 -- W.O. Connor.
- 1957 -- Meryl Amspacker. Circuit divided to form Bethlehem-Shady Grove Charge. Parsonage built in Inez in 1959.
- 1960 -- John Wood.
- 1961 -- W.D. Sabiston.
- 1964 -- Wayne Wingfield.
- 1966 -- James Henry Coile was married while here. Has served as chairman of "Rules of Order and Procedure" of N.C. Conference.
- 1970 -- William M. Hass. Came from Alabama and returned there after Duke. Died in July 1983.
- 1973 -- Ralph Waters.
- 1976 -- John Peacock.
- 1977 -- John M. Bowman. In 1982 he and Fayette celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary with a repeat of the original ceremony. Their Children served as attendants and hosted a beautiful reception in the Arcola Club House.
- 1982 -- Charles Cooper. Came from Arkansas and returned there after Duke. His mother was here with him.
- 1985 -- B. Wayne Ebert. Came from Florida and returned there after Duke.
- 1989 -- Kevin M. Morris. Came from Indiana and returned there.
- 1991 -- Timothy S. Hackett. Son of Rev. Charles M. Hackett, pastor of the Kenley-Buckhorn Charge in the Goldsboro District.

SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

So many persons have served their Lord and their church here at Bethlehem that it is possible to mention only a few in a short history. We will mention here the Bethlehem Sunday School Superintendents, each of which has served well. Records show:

1890 - 1899	Elizabeth R. Davis	(left for Scarritt)
1899 - 1909	George W. Davis	(he is believed to have served until his death at which time-
1910 - 1949	E.W. Conn	was elected)
1946 - 1949	Irvin Harris	(assistant during Mr. Conn's illness)
1949 -	J. P. Harris	until he left to teach school
1954 - 1955	Anton Reid	left for the army
1956 - 1968	no official record,	but the following served during that time...

Edward Conn
Robert Arrington
Sam King

1968 - now Anton Reid He gives an inspiring sermonette every Sunday. When the preacher is away Anton often fills the pulpit and gives us a message of faith, hope, and love.



