

History of Camp United Methodist Church

We are proud today that we have a long and illustrious heritage to celebrate at Camp United Methodist Church. However, we cannot ignore the heritage of the town of Shallotte because the two are inseparable. Both grew up together on the banks of the Shallotte River. The river was the life blood in providing transportation.

I believe that Shallotte is located where it is because it is at the crossroad of land and sea transportation. The town of Shallotte is as far as seagoing vessels could travel inland, and the coast road from Wilmington to Charleston crossed the Shallotte River here because it is the shortest distance between two high points of land from the inlet, marsh and river swamp.

It was natural then that a town and trading center should develop. It became the religious and social center as well, and to this day it is nearly impossible to travel from one end of Brunswick County to the other without going through Shallotte and pass by Camp United Methodist Church. Our founding fathers assured us of high visibility.

Land transportation was difficult and dangerous. A traveler wrote, "on the whole the road from Charleston to Wilmington is certainly the most tedious and disagreeable on the continent of North America, it being through a poor, barren, gloomy country without accommodations for travelers."

Charlotte River, later to be known as Shallotte River, was the location of a crossover which was to become a town. The earliest known reference to it was by a traveler in 1734. He crossed by ferry at what is variably called Charlotte, little Charlotte, and little Charlotta. As so often happened in those days, spelling conformed to different pronunciations and so Charlotte eventually became Shallotte.

As early as 1801, Bishop Asbury noted that the correct name was Charlotte, but that it was "vulgarly and improperly called Shallotte."

According to Brunswick County Court minutes of November 1807, a bridge spanned the river and there was a church and other structures on the river.

The name Shallotte became fixed in 1837 when the post office was established and mail service began. The town was incorporated in 1899.

Almost a hundred years before a Methodist Church was built at Shallotte, records show that religious services were being held on the grounds as early as the eighteenth century. Bishop Francis Asbury, famed Methodist circuit rider, recorded in his diary that he spent the night at Shallotte and conducted a service on the camping grounds.

To this day Methodists relate to others about Bishop Asbury's visit and point with pride to the spot where he preached.

In the fall of the year, people would come to Shallotte. Since there were no conveniences in which to stay, they brought their own tents which they pitched on the bank of the Shallotte River. Here they relaxed by fishing in the river and by hunting in the area.

These people were grateful to God for all He had given to them. Though they may have not been members of the same denomination, they seemed to be joined together by a common purpose—thankfulness for God's bountiful blessings. Here on the banks of the Shallotte River they held services in order to openly confess their shortcomings and to ask God's guidance through the coming year.

"Camp Methodist Church at Shallotte is one of the oldest churches in Southeastern North Carolina. The present site of Camp Church is on property deeded by Samuel Sleight to the

Methodist Church in 1855. It was the location of a traditional camp ground gathering and from this stems the current name.” (News & Observer), Vol. CXCVIII, No. 144, Saturday, May 23, 1964)

By February of 1799, the first building was erected— a very small wooden structure without means of heating. At this time the church was a part of the Bladen Circuit.

Since the church was located on the banks of the Shallotte River, it was named for the river and first called the “Shallotte Meeting House.” Bishop Asbury called it the “Charlotte Meeting House” and lamented the fact that it was “vulgarly and improperly called Shallotte.” Sometime prior to 1856 the church changed its name to “Campground.” The reason for the change came when the church grounds became the scene for the rousing camp meetings of the area.

The Campground Methodist Church grew out of the preaching and work of the early Methodist circuit riders who traveled the old Georgetown Road, living out of their saddlebags and preaching to the people wherever they found them. One such meeting occurred here on February 7, 1791, when Bishop Francis Asbury “preached at the Charlotte River to not less than one hundred people.” Two other meetings were recorded on February 10, 1799, and January 16, 1802.

In all, Bishop Asbury made nine visits to Brunswick County and preached at Shallotte, or Charlotte River, or Shallot, or Charlottesvillie (spelled variously in different entries). One entry in his journal describes this area as abounding “with bogs, swamps, and drains; if there were no sinners, I would not go along these roads.”

In his entry on March 10, 1799, he mentions “Shallot Church”: “The day was so excessively cold and the house so open, that I was chilled through my whole system.”

From Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in three volumes, Volume III, from January 1787 to December 31, 1810: New York: Eaton & Maines; Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye (n.d.)

(February 1801) NORTH CAROLINA – Bishop Asbury was very poetic in description of the area:

We have ridden at least five hundred and fifty, if not six hundred miles, over the hills, barrens, swamps, savannahs, rivers and creeks of South Carolina.

At Gause’s Manor, or more properly, town, we were pleasantly situated. I had a most solemn visit to the sea beach, which to me was a most instructive sight: the sea reminded me of its great Maker, ‘who stayeth the proud waves thereof’; its innumerable productions; the diversified features of its shores—the sand hills; the marsh; the pimenta, tall and slender; the sheep and goats frisking in the shade or browsing in the sun; or the eye, directed to the waters, beholds the rolling porpoise; the seagulls lifting and letting fall the clam, which breaking, furnishes them with food; the eagles with hovering wings watching for their prey; the white sail of the solitary vessel tossed upon the distant wave—how interesting a picture do all objects make.

We preached at William Gause’s, the patriarch of the place: his son stood for scribe, and assisted me in making extracts of letters to add to my manuscript.

We visited Charlotte meeting house named after the river, vulgarly and improperly called Shallotte. On our return, I prepared a few long letters for the north.

My mind is in great peace. I lament that I have no access to the poor: our way is strangely closed up at present in consequence of the address. I made my last visit to the sea. I thought upon my friends on the other side of the great waters; my voyage to this country; the little probability there was of my ever again seeing my dear mother, or my native land.

We have been preaching in three or four places; to sit at Bepent's in Brunswick County, and at the Manor."

Sometime after the Civil war, probably between 1865 and 1870, the forefathers, sensing a need for the spirit of Christ in their lives and the presence of God in their homes, built the second church building in Shallotte on the old camping ground, replacing the small building previously used there for worship. They could not see what we now see, but they took a step in faith and dedicated themselves to the fulfillment of their responsibilities in the Living Church. This building was a large wooden structure with two entrances which opened into one room with two aisles and three rows of seats, the center row being the longest.

The property on which our present sanctuary now stands belonged to Samuel W. Sleight, an explorer who had come down from the North. Mr. Sleight, realizing the significance and the meaning of the Shallotte meetings, promised to give the property so that it could always be used for religious services. "The indenture was made on the 17th day of February A.D., 1855, between Sam W. Sleight of the County of Brunswick and State of North Carolina on the one part and John J. Brooks and John R. Chadwick, A.C. Tolson, Thomas G. Drew and Nathaniel Leonard, trustees of the Methodist Church, a Religious Society on the other part, for the sum of 'One Dollar'." The execution of the deed was made February 25, 1878.

"On March 7, 1891, an application was made and leave granted for the church at Shallotte Camp to be moved and replaced with a new one." (First Quarterly Conference, Brunswick Circuit.)

In 1896, according to minutes, the third church structure was completed. This was a large wooden structure. The wooden doors opened into an aisle which led to the front of the sanctuary. The high ceiling was a masterpiece of woodwork art and it was admired by all who worshipped there. The pews in use at this time were constructed of narrow slats which were not very comfortable.

As far as can be determined, a Methodist Society has been active in Shallotte since Bishop Asbury's meetings here.

For many, many years, all the townspeople who lived within hearing distance were reminded every Sunday morning that it was time to come to Sunday School by the ringing of the old church bell.

Mr. James Holmes was the faithful one who tolled out this news each Sunday morning.

In 1951, Dr. C.D. Barclift, Superintendent of the Wilmington District, North Carolina Conference, Southeastern Jurisdiction of The Methodist Church, came to realize, along with leaders of the old Shallotte Camp Ground Church, that a great deal of potential could be realized if the church became a station separate from the circuit. Accordingly, the North Carolina Conference, which met at Grace Methodist Church in Wilmington, authorized the formation of a station appointment to be known as Shallotte Camp Methodist Church, which denotes the historical origin around the old campground.

When Shallotte Camp Methodist Church became a station, the Reverend Lawrence J. Bridges was appointed as pastor. He served as pastor from 1951 to 1955. His annual salary finally reached the total sum of \$2,600 by 1954-55.

Bishop Paul N. Garber served the North Carolina Conference, and V.E. Queen was District Superintendent during this time. Paul M. Croom was the Delegate to Conference.

By 1954 the total church membership was 110; the church school membership was 121.

There was a Women's Division of Christian Service with a membership of 35.

During the years of Lawrence Bridges' pastorate, many things began to change.

As has been mentioned, the old slatted pews were most uncomfortable, but money was scarce. The ladies of the church, then called the Women's Society of Christian Service, planned many money-making projects. One called "The Talent Project," was taken from The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25). Each person was given an amount of money to use during the year to make a profit. Everyone—the men and women, the boys and girls—participated, raising and selling hogs, cattle, corn, garden vegetables, flowers; shining shoes; washing cars; sewing; and peddling almost every conceivable household gadget known.

Other money-making projects were made: pork barbecues, chicken barbecues, sales of Christmas and birthday cards, Christmas and birthday gifts—anything to honestly make a dime.

The first choir robes were made and used for the Christmas program on December 16, 1951. How proud all were of the choir! Joyce Carmichael was the choir director, a position which she held with dedication and distinction for 30 years.

In his report on December 14, 1952, Church School Superintendent Hugh B. Cherry stated that the membership was 125 and that all lesson materials were approved by The Methodist Church.

(Camp Methodist Church School Superintendent's Report)
Quarter Ending December 14, 1952

Since the last Quarterly Conference, the Camp Methodist Sunday School has added two classes to its number. This was done because it was felt that some of the smaller children were included in groups which too large a difference in their ages.

The children's department was reorganized and the following classes were formed: Beginners, Primary, Juniors, Intermediate Juniors, Intermediate Seniors and Seniors.

In the adult department no changes were made. Separate classes are conducted—one for the ladies and one for the men. As the Sunday School grew, additional space was needed.

The increase of two classes brought up the problem of additional Sunday School rooms. This was solved by using business establishments as class rooms. Now the classes are held as follows: The Beginners and Primary classes are held in the two rooms located in the front of the Church. The Juniors go to Fred Mintz's Drug Store. The two Intermediate classes are held in Dr. W.E. Swain's reception rooms. The Senior class is held in Mr. E.H. Kirby's store. The Men's Class is held in the Shallotte Furniture Store, and the Ladies Class is held in the Church Auditorium.

Since the last Quarterly Conference, each class has begun the use of the individual registration and attendance record cards.

The hour for Sunday School was changed to begin 15 minutes earlier, now meeting at 9:45 a.m. and ending at 10:45 a.m. This permits parents to take their children home and return for Church Service at 11:00 a.m.

The Sunday School re-assemble in the Church Auditorium was eliminated. This allows the teachers more time to properly conduct their classes.

The 1952 budget was \$5804 and the pastor's salary was \$2400.

(Reports of Lawrence Bridges at the close of the first quarter of 1952.)

This Quarterly Conference marks the close of the first quarter in second year of Camp Methodist Church as a station. The first year as a station, when compared to the previous year could be termed a success. When viewed in the light of the church's possibilities, however, it is

only a small step in the right direction. The total money given in 1951 was \$1,700. The total money given in 1952 was \$5,100. The budget in 1951 (not including current expenses) is \$4,900. Only \$3,300 has been pledged for the current year. The Board of Stewards have done well in collecting the pledges and in their concern for the finances of the church.

In August of 1953, two years after the Church became a station, a move was made to build a new church building and parsonage. Plans were made to sell the Church's old campground property and build at a different location. A new site was bought where the Episcopal Church is now located. The plan was later abandoned partly because of the relocation of U.S. 17 cut through the property and partly because of sentiment to build on the site of the old campground where this building now sits. Another factor that entered into the picture was a reversion clause in the deed that Samuel Sleight conveyed to the trustees in 1855 that stated that should the property not be used for religious purposes, the land would revert back to Samuel Sleight and his heirs. Although when Sleight returned North prior to the War Between the States, he was never heard of again. However, this did not relieve the legal entanglements that we became involved in. Land that had been used for security required title insurance.

By August of 1954, \$20,000 was in the building fund but because of some of the problems I just mentioned, work did not begin until 1957.

Mr. W.R. (Willie) Holmes wrote a letter commending the trustees for not building across the river and presented an eloquent plea for using the old campground for a new building:

“As to the release of the proposed building site for the church across the river, this is one of the best moves yet to be made by the present members of trustees.

Many years before the late Samuel W. Sleight conveyed this “Camp Ground” to the trustees of the Methodist Church in the year 1855, it was used by all Christian denominations for religious camp meetings, that wished to come to Shallotte in the Fall season of the year, after the crops were harvested, and they wished to get near the seacoast for hunting and fishing, and general relaxation.

Shallotte came into being around this “campground;” it has always been recognized and revered as holy ground and to move the church from here would be unthinkable. The deed was made to John H. Brooks, John R. Chadwick, A.D. Tolson, Thomas J. Drew and Nathaniel Leonard, Trustees of the Methodist Church and their successors in office, with the following revert clause incorporated in the conveyance. That when the said trustees and their successors in office refuse to use and occupy the said premises, it shall revert to the said Samuel W. Sleight heirs.

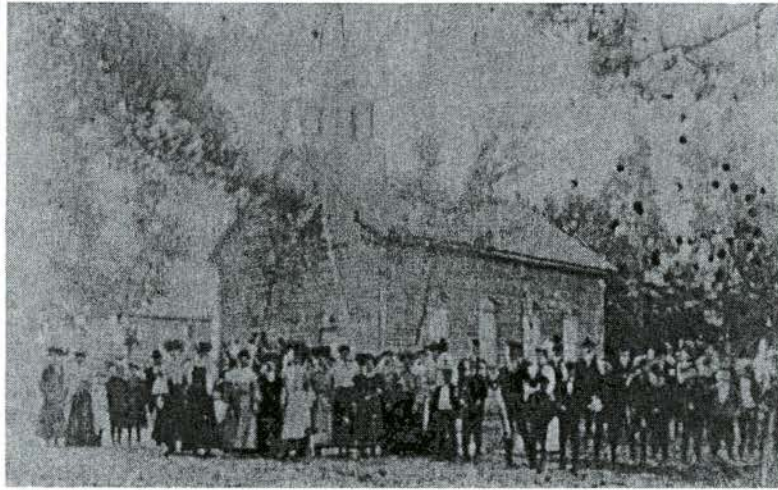
What would be a monument to the memory of all those who have been members of the Camp church, the many young preachers who saw their first work here, the old preachers who were ready to be placed on the superannuated list, many now gone to their last reward, than a new modern edifice on the campground.”

Ground was broken for a new church on Friday, May 17, 1957, at 5:30 p.m. by Bishop Paul N. Garber and the members of the Cabinet of the North Carolina Conference. A general building committee was headed by LeRoy Mintz, Sr.; the finance committee by R.D. White Jr.; and the building committee by Aubrey C. Johnson.

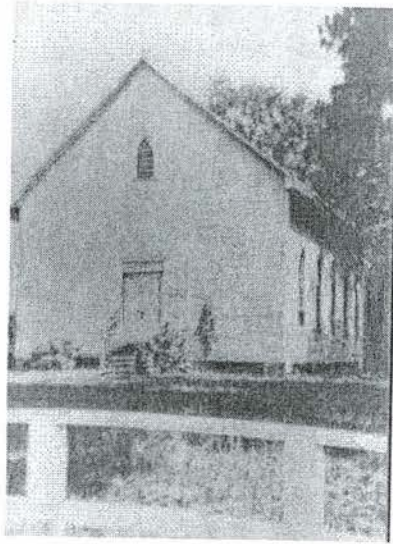
The new building, which consisted of a sanctuary, a kitchen, a fellowship hall, seven classrooms, and an office, was built in a modern design on the old camping ground.

The total cost of the new church was \$63,000; the cost of the parsonage was \$27,000—a total of \$80,000. This was a tremendous undertaking for a membership of 130.

2nd Church



3rd Church



Camp United Methodist Church. 1998.